



Charlie Company Leads BLT into Northern Iraq

by First Lieutenant Christopher Mercer, Forward Observer, Charlie Company, BLT 1/8

<http://www.usmc.mil/26thmeu/Releases/Charlie%20Comp%20in%20Iraq.htm>>.12 June 2003.

The Marines and Sailors of Battalion Landing Team 1/8 were summoned to action in early April to go ashore and secure the Al'Mosul Airport in order to provide a means of strategic airlift for the joint arena of northern Iraq. The airport was located in the fourth largest city in Iraq and home to an Iraqi Republican Guard Unit. As they have prepared for so many months to operate in any clime or place, the men of Charlie company expeditiously answered their call to duty receiving a mere 24 hours notice before they began deploying from their ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Capt John J. Miles, commanding officer of Charlie Company, seemingly put it best when briefing his Marines before flying into northern Iraq, "You've sung about it while running, now you're going to do it. 'C-130 rollin' down the strip, Charlie Company's gonna take a little trip."

In the early morning hours of April 12th the Marines did exactly that as they boarded C-130's and settled down for lengthy plane ride into Irbil, Iraq. On deck, they were first greeted by elements of Joint Special Operation's Task Force North (JSOTF) and immediately began staging in preparation for insertion into Mosul. Throughout that first day several planeloads brought in the BLT staff, Charlie Company, and some supporting elements. After nightfall, Charlie Company was lined up on the flight line in helo-stick order, as they are accustomed to doing as the BLT's primary helicopter-borne raid company.

Helicopter lift from Irbil into the Mosul airfield was provided by a section of the Air Force's Special Operations Support Squadron flying their specialized version of the CH-53 helicopter. Outfitted with .50 caliber machineguns, they flew in and began shuttling Marines from Irbil to Mosul. The Marines knew they were flying into hostile territory as tracers from small arms fire streaked up through the night sky from the city below. Once on the ground in Mosul, the company was directed to a concrete, open-ended aircraft hangar at the south end of the airfield to settle in for the night while the staff was establishing a command post in the terminal and making appropriate liaison with the Army's Special Forces unit operating out of the same building.

By sunrise on the 13th, the flights inbound from Irbil ceased. A portion of Charlie Company was still in Irbil along with all the supplies that the Marines couldn't carry on their backs into Mosul. With the likelihood of the remainder of the company moving by air being doubtful, Charlie Company's executive officer, 1st Lt Scott M. McGuckin, sought to make liaison to insert the remainder of Charlie Company into Mosul anyway possible. Luckily, he stumbled into some Special Forces soldiers leaving Irbil heading west to Mosul. He informed the BLT and a combination of the available civilian and military vehicles was organized into a convoy. Taking charge of a platoon from of the 10th Mountain Division, the remaining Marines of Charlie Company, and setting the SF soldiers in the lead vehicle, 1stLt McGuckin executed a tactical forty-mile convoy to Mosul and arrived intact later that afternoon.

The Marines already in Mosul had their work cut out for them. First platoon of Charlie Company took over security of the Main Gate of the airport from the Kurdish PDK forces that were guarding much of the airfield perimeter. First platoon also was placed in charge of the terminal building to provide security for the MEU's command element. Second platoon set up security to the south, and portions of third platoon and weapons platoon were sent to the North Gate of the airfield. When the Marines arrived at the North Gate they found the post being abandoned by the PDK who loaded onto trucks and left.

As the sun went down the Marines hurried to set in to the best positions they could manage in lowlight conditions. A section of Weapons Company's heavy guns arrived at the gate at sunset to provide support. Throughout the night the Marines sat quietly, waiting, until just before 0500 local time when they heard words spoken in Arabic being broadcast through a speaker in the distance. They later learned this was one of several "calls to prayer" to be issued throughout the day from the community's mosque. Within minutes a shot rang out close by, then more shooting from multiple sources along the platoon's position. The tracer rounds from those AK-47's were directed at the positions that the Marines had established only hours ago just before sun-

down. Cpl Khattab of third platoon was the first to return fire. Other Marines then immediately joined him as they spotted muzzle flashes coming from the tall grass that separated them from the perimeter wall. After a couple of minutes the enemy fire stopped as abruptly as it had begun. In the silence that followed, team leaders began assessing the condition of their Marines and passing reports to higher while the distant sound of prayers being sung from the wailing tower could be heard.

After sunrise the next morning the Marines began continuing actions by improving their positions and their defensive posture. As one of the squad leaders from third platoon, Sgt Philippe, began crossing the main street leading out of the North Gate shots rang out again. "I heard the 'crack' of rounds passing close by and I grabbed the first piece of cover I could find," he said. No one could identify the source of the shooting only the general direction. After a pause and no further shooting, Sgt Philippe set out again to cross the street and was fired upon a second time. This time the source was identified and the Marines returned fire. A clear and search team was formed and dispatched to the building, but there was nothing there.

Later in the morning, a platoon from Bravo Company relieved the Marines at the North Gate and the Main Gate while Charlie Company loaded up in vehicles. Convoys ferried the Charlie Company Marines out to each of the five bridges connecting northeast Mosul to southwest Mosul. For several hours the Marines manned these bridges straddling the Tigris River, stopping vehicles to note the numbers and types of weapons among the populace. This also served as a message to the people of Mosul that the Marines had arrived. The majority of the people expressed their appreciation and welcomed the Marines to their country.

At dusk, Charlie Company returned to the airfield and resumed their duties performing security at the terminal and the southern perimeter. The third day in country, after manning the bridges, Charlie Company was tasked with relieving Bravo Company's Marines on the North Gate and establishing a company defensive position in that sector while providing gate security. This gate was to serve as the primary military access point to the airfield. The company quickly went to work setting in machine gun positions, delegating sectors of fire to each weapon system the company employs, and clearing through all of the buildings in that portion of the airfield. Many of the buildings were former classrooms and administrative offices for a Republican Guard unit stationed there. How long the buildings had been vacant was unclear. Many military items such as old helmets and personal uniform items could be found throughout. During the clearing of buildings Marines discovered large wooden shipping crates labeled "Machine Parts" but filled with NBC decontamination kits and gas masks. In other places large sacks labeled "Grain" or "Detergent" were opened and found to contain combat boots or other uniform items.

Some of the rooms that appeared to be training classrooms had murals depicting the silhouettes of American aircraft painted on their walls. There were land navigation classrooms and rooms adapted for large-scale sand table exercises. The Marines took that sand and put it into sandbags for their defensive positions as it was just a little less to dig up. They fortified the buildings along their perimeter, and over the course of the next few days they filled over 5,000 sandbags. They dug trench systems, strung barbed wire over ground-floor entrances to blockade them from enemy infiltration and ran as much concertina wire around their perimeter that they could acquire. Unfortunately, due to the tall grass and number of buildings in close proximity to the perimeter walls there were gaps that could only be covered by fire and limited observation in the event of an attack.

Immediately the Marines began conducting urban combat patrols throughout the streets to the immediate front of the North Gate's location. These foot mobile patrols were conducted day and night to show a presence of force to the local community and never extended much further than two to three kilometers away from the gate. At nearly every street corner there were men gathered on the street with bonfires and roadblocks in an effort, they said, to prohibit robbers and looters from damaging their community. Many of the men carried AK-47 assault rifles and it became commonplace to hear gunshots fired within hundreds of meters of the patrols as they made their way through the neighborhoods along their routes.

One patrol from 1st Platoon that went out discovered an SA-7 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile lying abandoned in the grass near the side of the main road leading from the gate. An EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) team was dispatched to meet the patrol and neutralize the weapon. Further investigation of the area and

questioning of the local people by HET (human exploitation team) discovered that a nearby group of buildings was, in fact, an abandoned Baath Party Compound. This area was searched and piles of burned documents were found scattered about, including some actual photos showing Saddam Hussein or his sons with local leaders (whose faces had been cut out of the pictures).

On another patrol later in the week, one Marine observed a discarded AK-47 magazine near the gate to an apparently abandoned complex of buildings. The patrol leader decided to send a fire team behind the walls of the compound to perform a quick cursory search of the area. Immediately the fire team leader reported finding ammunition in large quantities. Uncovered there was a room with crates of mortar rounds littering the floor, and in one section of the courtyard there were dozens of 12.7mm heavy machine gun rounds strewn about. Many of the rounds had been separated from their shell casings and the gunpowder removed, but it was unclear why. Once again an EOD team was dispatched to deal with the unexploded ordnance.

Many of the patrols were greeted by young children who gave the Marines flowers and spoke to them in what little English they had learned in school saying phrases like, "How are you?" or "Good, good. USA." They would smile and give a "thumb's up" sign while following the patrols for as long as they could till older men on the streets would tell the kids to not bother the Marines. Many of the people were dressed in a western style of clothing, but the Marines noted that the younger men who wore traditional clothing seemed to act the unfriendliest to their presence patrolling the streets. Throughout the day, towers with large speakers atop them would broadcast Arabic to the people calling them to prayers at any of the community mosques. The broadcasts were often sung and they lasted for five to ten minutes at a time.

On Easter Sunday, the Marines were especially vigilant. Due to the religious significance of the day, an attack was expected. All during the previous week men would observe the Marine's activities with binoculars from the rooftops of houses across from the perimeter. Men would ride up to the gate in taxi cabs and count the number of Marines manning the post and noting the Marine's reactions before riding away. But Easter morning passed without incident and the Marines returned to conducting patrols and hardening their defensive positions. It was reported that elements of the army's 101st Airborne and 4th Infantry Division would begin arriving that day and to expect them to enter the airfield through the North Gate. But by the end of the day, no soldiers had arrived.

Marine discover a tunnel system inside the company perimeter after a firefight. Enemy muzzle flashes were seen coming from this position during the engagement. Throughout the night the Marines kept watch and at around 4:40 a.m. local time the next morning Charlie Company, along with the Light Armored Reconnaissance Platoon and the 81mm Mortar Platoon was attacked. "I saw the shadow of a figure climbing over the wall. When I looked through my night vision scope I saw the silhouette of a weapon in the hand of the figure and I opened fire," said LCpl Adair of 2nd Platoon. Immediately the enemy began firing on LCpl Adair's position from two other sources. Then from the rooftops of the buildings along the perimeter wall the enemy engaged Charlie Company's defensive positions in an attempt to suppress them. There were enemy tracers also coming up from the high-grass along the perimeter. The enemy directed their fires at the sandbagged positions and the Marines responded with overwhelming firepower. The enemy stopped shooting after a few minutes and the Marines ceased fire and began collecting ammunition and casualty reports. During the lull, Sgt Leclair of third platoon reported, "Sir, I see something in the grass that wasn't there before . . . now I see movement," with which he fired three rounds into the high grass where the movement was. Immediately the enemy returned fire from the high grass and the fight began again. The enemy fires increased as other aggressors climbed on rooftops in the town and began firing in the direction of the North Gate. The glowing paths of tracers were nighttime's evidence of the rounds that were punching into the sides of the buildings Marines were returning fire from. From a distance tracers could be seen arching over the rooftops of the Marine's positions as the enemy continued attacking from the perimeter. The Marines directed their fires at the sources of enemy fires sighting in on muzzle flashes and gaining fire superiority. Eventually the enemy withdrew and the Marines ceased their fires.

Charlie Company resumed their ammunition and casualty reporting and learned they had taken no casualties during the firefight. At dawn, patrols of the perimeter were initiated. The Marines cleared and searched the

residential houses along the perimeter from which they were being shot at. The houses were empty of people and the rooftops yielded little more than the strong smell of gunpowder and AK-47 shell casings. Within the high-grass there were dug-in fighting positions and the openings to a tunnel system not visible before due to the thick vegetation. The perimeter fence-line had been breached in more than one place. There was a manhole cover leading to a pipeline that opened up in the street running parallel to the Marine's perimeter immediately outside the airfield. The Marines got right to work booby-trapping these breach points while they requested additional supplies to fortify their position and to guard against further penetration. The intensity of the morning's attack was evident in the bullet holes dotting the sandbagged positions and the pockmarked concrete walls surrounding the windows from which the Marines returned fire.

It must have seemed to the enemy imbedded in the local populace that the Marines had called for reinforcements as elements of the army finally began arriving. Throughout the day of April 21st, convoys of vehicles numbering more than twenty and thirty strong began arriving. Bradley Fighting Vehicles, armored HMMWV's, and M1A1 Abrams tanks shook the ground as they rolled through the North Gate and began staging in the airfield. Charlie Company continued to defend the North Gate and accept the army as they arrived throughout the following night.

As the army amassed their forces on the airfield Charlie Company was told to prepare to be relieved by them. The Marines continued to harden and improve their positions anyway throughout the day of the 22nd and ended up remaining in position for an additional night. Just before dusk, snipers attached to the company watched as a teenager walked along the east of the perimeter with an AK-47 rifle in his hands examining it. The sniper's line of fire was obstructed and while he was working to clear it his spotter observed the teenager raise the rifle to his shoulder and fire a round in the direction of the Marines. As the sniper sighted back in on him, the shooter disappeared from view for a few seconds. He re-emerged running into the street with no weapon and began playing soccer with several children there. 2ndLt R.L. Miller, the platoon commander who was responsible for that sector of the company's position, decided to send a squad of his Marines out to snatch the shooter and detain him for interrogation. As the squad left the company's lines in pursuit of the enemy, the shooter went into a nearby house. The Marines entered the residence and returned with the shooter and the shooter's father. While searching the detainees, it was discovered that the shooter still had a cartridge belt underneath his clothing and was carrying a large sum of cash. At the North Gate there were Marines from the MEU's human intelligence unit waiting to take these detainees away for interrogation. It was learned that the shooter was seventeen years old but the weapon he used to shoot at the Marines was never retrieved. Several hours later the detainees were returned to the gate and released.

Just before dawn on the 23rd, Charlie's defensive lines were tested yet again. This time the focus of the attack came from the northeastern flank. A force of about a fire-team sized element opened fire on the Marines who returned fire in kind. Just as in previous firefights, the enemy ceased attacking and the Marines ceased fire. With thermal imaging devices the Marines scanned the perimeter for any sign of enemy movement. Within minutes the enemy picked up and attempted to flee. The Marines opened fire. This initiated another firefight lasting for several minutes until eventually the enemy withdrew from the perimeter. The Marines ceased fire and once again the sandbags of their positions had evidence of enemy fire. Fortunately, Charlie Company took no casualties and once again succeeded in repelling the assault with overwhelming firepower.

As the sun rose, the Marines sent out a search team only to find empty shell casings from the enemy and nothing more. A company from the army's 101st Airborne came forward to relieve Charlie Company of their responsibilities on the gate. Turnover of the defensive position was completed when a mechanized company from the army's 4th Infantry Division reinforced the gate and augmented the 101st. Charlie Company was moved back to its original location at the southern end of the airfield to stage awaiting transportation back to the ship.

While the BLT began back-loading Marines out of the country, Charlie Company settled down to wait their turn. The nightly fireworks display of small arms tracer rounds lighting up the sky as aircraft flew in to the airfield was so common that it became expected. During the days the Marines were in Mosul several black funnel clouds were visible as ammunition supply points within a few miles of the airfield continued to burn and

detonate unexpended ordinance. The sounds of distant explosions and the smoke filled skies were something everyone had grown accustomed to and hardly took notice of.

On Saturday, the 26th, the first flights of Charlie Company left Iraq. The first half of the company boarded C-130's and began the long flight back. By the next day the entire company completed its extraction from northern Iraq and returned to the USS Iwo Jima where the ship's crew greeted them with much enthusiasm and a warm welcome. After turning in their unexpended ammunition, cleaning their weapons, and grabbing a quick bite of chow, the Marines got their first shower and haircut in more than two weeks. Then they began the arduous task of cleaning all the personal gear covered in the fine dust and dirt of northwestern Iraq. But, it was good to be "home."

For many in Charlie Company this was their first time in actual combat. Due to the leadership and initiative at the lowest levels the Marines were successful. They were tested several times and they held their ground. Many of them reflect on the short time they were in Iraq and say they wish they could have stayed longer. But, in the simplest of terms, they were given a mission and they accomplished it. Now they are standing by, prepared and waiting for the next mission.



Experience and Adaptability Ensure Success for 24th MEU (SOC) in Iraq

by Corporal Jeff Sisto

<[http://www.globalsecurity.org/...03/05/mil-030512-usmc01.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/mil-030512-usmc01.htm)>.12 May 2003.

USS NASSAU (LHA-4), Underway(May 8, 2003)—As the USS Nassau (LHA-4) Amphibious Ready Group steamed out of the Arabian Gulf, members of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) looked forward to returning home after eight months away. Throughout the deployment, the MEU experienced a variety of foreign terrain and diverse cultures, challenging training exercises and real world missions—all of which helped prepare them for their ultimate test—Operation Iraqi Freedom.

OIF proved the MEU's effectiveness on many levels. As a relatively small, amphibious unit, the MEU first demonstrated, and then broke the boundaries of its doctrinal capabilities by conducting combat operations over 250 miles inside the Iraqi border. Ultimately, the MEU operated as far north as Al Kut—a city 60 miles south of Baghdad.

Experience played a large part in the 24th MEU (SOC)'s effectiveness in the war. Working with the USS Nassau ARG for a year and a half perfected their ability to ensure safe and efficient offload procedures—a skill that defines an effective ARG and keeps a MEU in business. In addition, the MEU had experience in anti-terrorism, peace support operations, and months of desert warfare training in the Middle East. With a resume like that, it was no surprise that they would successfully participate in the war in Iraq.

The Order

While on ship, the 24th MEU received the order to go into Iraq well after preparations had been made to return home. However, within 96 hours of receiving the order to go in, MEU Service Support Group 24 worked with the USS Nassau ARG to facilitate a successful offload of all MEU personnel, cargo, vehicles, and supplies.

Operationally, the MEU assumed their role in Operation Iraqi Freedom would be to support Task Force Tarawa and fill in the gaps left by the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and the Army's 3rd Infantry Division during their push for Baghdad. Yet, operations officers remained flexible, planning for a number of different contingencies.

"I MEF and the 3rd ID pushed so far, so fast, that it left communication and supply lines vulnerable to remaining pockets of resistance," said Capt. Mark Paolicelli, 24th MEU (SOC) Assistant Operations and Fire Support Officer. "We knew we would be used to help secure those vulnerabilities, but we also knew we had to be adaptable from there on out."

A successful offload and convoy brought the MEU to Logistics Support Area Viper in Iraq. After a brief consolidation at Camp Viper, the MEU's Battalion Landing Team, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, pushed forward to Qalat Sukar Airfield, while I MEF continued their advance north. The threat of convoy ambushes along the way was constant and the Marines expected to be engaged by Iraqi paramilitaries, who had already inflicted numerous casualties to I MEF Marines in the town of An Nasiriyah.

"By securing the rear supply lines and lingering pockets of resistance, it allowed I MEF to focus on the more conventional fighting with the Iraqi Army," said Maj. Darrel Benfield, Operations officer, BLT 2/2. "This also meant that we would have to face the unpredictable fighting style that unconventional forces use."

Upon arriving at Camp Viper, the MSSG led a 93-vehicle convoy with the remaining MSSG and Command Element personnel to Qalat Sukar Airfield to establish a command post. The Qalat Sukar Airfield soon became Camp Fenway—the command post of the 24th MEU (SOC). From there, the MEU conducted a series of missions that ensured safe supply routes, destroyed Iraqi paramilitaries, and ensured successful peace support operations.

With An Ace

One of the most challenging aspects of the MEU's participation in OIF is the fact that they operated without the support of their Aviation Combat Element. Once the MEU received word to go into Iraq, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 was split up and chopped out to different Marine Aircraft Groups operating inside Iraq to conduct challenging missions of their own.

The AV-8 Harriers were sent to the all-Harrier MAG-13, flying Offensive Air Support (both Close Air Support and Ariel Interdiction) mostly between Baghdad and Tikrit.

Parts of the ACE's Marine Air Control Group Detachment were chopped to MACG-38, where they provided Air Support services to Task Force Tarawa and 1st Marine Division from Al Kut to the Yankee Forward Arming and Refueling Point outside of Baghdad.

Rotary-wing aircraft joined MAG-29, operating from Riverfront Forward Operating Base and the USS Nassau providing Assault Support, Offensive Air Support, and Visual Reconnaissance to both 1st Marine Division and TFT units as well as the UK Division in Basrah. CH-46 Helicopters flew mostly Casualty Evacuations and Assault Support, as well as transporting Enemy Prisoners of War. CH-53 helicopters also conducted Assault Support by carrying water, chow, and ammunition to various units. They were also used to insert an Explosive Ordnance Disposal team to assist in the recovery of the body of an F/A-18 pilot who had been shot down. The UH-1N helicopter performed the utility role, conducting everything from command visits to Cas-Evacs, to route and visual reconnaissance.

Throughout their missions, each type of aircraft received fire—mostly from small arms. None were lost.

“Our only known battle damage was one AH-1 that was hit in the fuselage and in the tail rotor drive shaft,” said Maj. Jim Jenkins, Operations Officer, HMM-263. “Marines from a west coast unit took the same part off another aircraft that was more shot up and our aircraft flew again the same day it was hit. It was a great example of the teamwork and mission focus that all the Marines had out there.”

“The Harriers received radar indications of threat systems on nearly every sortie, but never had visual indications of a launch,” Jenkins added.

Missions

One of the first missions that the MEU conducted was the recovery of the body of a Marine from Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 in the town of As Ashatrah. BLT's Fox Company led a successful recovery mission that brought the body of the Marine back home. There were also several raids conducted in the towns of Qalat Sukar, where a former Ba'ath Party headquarters building stood, Al Hay, and Al Rifa.

The biggest conventional threat to the MEU was the position of the Iraqi 10th Armored Division, located 50 miles to the east of Camp Fenway at an airfield in Al Amarah. An attack was soon planned to invade and secure the airfield held by the Iraqis. Riding in the back of Assault Amphibian Vehicles, Echo Co. and other members of the BLT pushed east into the airfield in Al Amarah, only to find the enemy had abandoned it, leaving their tanks and ammunition behind.

Several blocking positions were also set up by the BLT, which helped in detaining over 60 deserters of the Iraqi Army, hundreds of small arms weapons, and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

The last offensive mission that the 24th MEU (SOC) participated in was the raid on the city of Al Kut. While I MEF headed the push through the city, the MEU set up blocking positions in the most probable routes of retreat. Several detainees and weapons were found this way.

Peace support operations then became the main focus for the MEU. Members of Golf Co. soon began conducting foot and vehicle patrols through the city of Qalat Sukar. This helped in getting additional information about Ba'ath party officials and opened the lines of communication with the citizens. The MEU was able to recover valuable information about the needs of the city. Electricity, food, water, and trash were the main concerns, as well as establishing a local police force.

Throughout the patrols, the Marines still took every precaution to protect themselves from sniper fire and suicide bombers. It took a delicate balance of being cautious and abiding by the Rules of Engagement.

“We never saw a uniformed Iraqi soldier,” said Benfield. “Many of the soldiers we came across were

deserters in civilian clothing. Our Marines exercised a lot of restraint while operating in a lot of uncertainty. They did a great job of interpreting the ROE.”

None of these missions would have been possible without the continued support of the MSSG. Throughout OIF, the MSSG would end up totaling more than 30,000 miles on the road during convoy security missions and supply runs. The MSSG also produced 142,935 gallons of potable water for the MEU and surrounding units with their two Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units or (ROWPU). Approximately 10,000 Marines and Sailors stayed hydrated through their efforts.

“There were four hygiene specialists to operate two different ROWPU sites. They did everything I expected them to do because of their prior training,” said Capt. Erik Post, Engineer Officer, MSSG 24. “They operated these ROWPUs for 26 days and produced more water than they ever did before. They did an outstanding job.”

Additionally, the MSSG performed Humanitarian Assistance missions—cleaning up a school, building a soccer field, leveling birms, fixing ambulances, and training local police forces—all in the vicinity of Qalat Sukar and Al Rifa.

“I think the overall sentiment of the Marines was that they were not ready to go home until they contributed to the war effort,” said Capt. Denise Garcia, Operations Officer, MSSG 24. “They just wanted a mission and wanted to know where they could help, above and beyond what is normally asked of them.”

Ultimately, the MEU was one of the first units to leave Iraq. After turning over their Area of Operation to the 15th MEU and elements of Task Force Tarawa, the MEU began the retrograde back to Kuwait and then onto the ships. At last, they began the journey home.

“We engaged the enemy on several occasions and, thankfully, we’ve had no casualties,” said Col. Richard Mills, Commanding Officer, 24th MEU (SOC), “Our Aviation Combat Element flew numerous combat missions in support of the I Marine Expeditionary Force and did a superb job. I’m proud of what all my Marines have accomplished here.”



Cannon Cockers at War: The 11th Marines in Operation Iraqi Freedom

by Lieutenant Colonel Michael R. Melillo

Field Artillery Journal, September-October 2003.

During the 1st Marine Division's epic attack from northern Kuwait to Basrah, Al Kut, Baghdad and Tikrit, the 11th Marine Regiment moved farther and faster than any Marine artillery regiment in history. Despite the arduous conditions, rapid advance and difficult terrain, the 11th Marines engaged the enemy in every battle of the campaign. No other regiment can make that claim. The 11th Marines processed more than 1,900 radar missions and fired 19,883 rounds with tremendous accuracy and devastating effects in support of the 1st Marine Division. This is the story of the 11th Marines in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

The 11th Marine Regiment began deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and OIF on 17 January 2003 when elements of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines (1/11) set sail from San Diego, California, as part of the seven-ship flotilla comprising Amphibious Task Force West (ATF-West).

Training for War. Although 17 January marked the beginning of the regiment's deployment, the 11th Marines began preparing for the deployment and eventual combat operations months before. All training focused on the potential deployment: moving rapidly, delivering accurately massed fires and defeating the Iraqi Army's potent artillery threat.

Initial training exercises at Camp Pendleton, California, (July 2002) and the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) at Twentynine Palms, California, (September 2002) focused on moving through restricted terrain, deploying using maritime prepositioning force (MPF) assets, meeting the five requirements of accurate predicted fire and streamlining command and control (C²) of the regiment. This initial training culminated with a live-fire division tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) at MCGACC.

Upon returning from Twentynine Palms, the regiment participated in a I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) exercise that served as a rehearsal for operations in Iraq. This enabled the regiment to integrate many of the command, control, communications and computer (C⁴) systems that were not employed during the division TEWT in September and exercise (C²) in a scenario it was likely to face in the near future.

In each of these exercises, the regiment learned new lessons. The interaction between the staffs within the regiment served to build a cohesive team and developed a greater understanding of the enemy and the terrain on which the regiment would fight.

FA-Air Wing Quick-Fire Counterfire Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP). In the fall, as the regiment began more detailed planning for initial operations against the Iraqi III Corps in southeastern Iraq, the 11th Marines developed TTP to strike at the enemy's tactical center of gravity: his artillery. Based on the 11th Marines' assessment, the threat was, specifically, the Iraqi Army's multiple rocket launchers (MRLs) and its long-range artillery (GHN-45 and G-5 howitzers).

To counteract this threat, the regiment developed, tested and established a reactive counterfire procedure that integrated the division's artillery with the Marine air wing's fixed-wing aircraft using a "quick-fire" link between the 11th Marines combat operations center (COC) and the direct air support center (DASC).

The regiment communicated digitally—via the advanced FA tactical data system (AFATDS)—with the 1st Marine Division fire support coordination center (FSCC) and used a DASC hotline to accelerate the tasking of "on-station" aircraft to the target, which had been located by a radar. This process reduced the time it took to pass the request between sensor and shooter and to destroy the enemy artillery through a combination of artillery and fixed-wing fires.

Through command post exercises (CPXs) at the I MEF and MCAGCC Simulation Center and a subsequent

live-fire exercise at Camp Pendleton, the 11th Marines validated the quick-fire TTP and trained to aggressively employ Q-46A and Q-37 radars to locate the enemy artillery and destroy it with artillery and fixed-wing fires. Throughout the campaign in Iraq, these procedures were employed with great success.

11th Marines Task Organization.

The 11th Marines deployed to Kuwait during January and February in support of OEF. Deployed by both air and sea, the regiment had a combination MPF and organic equipment.

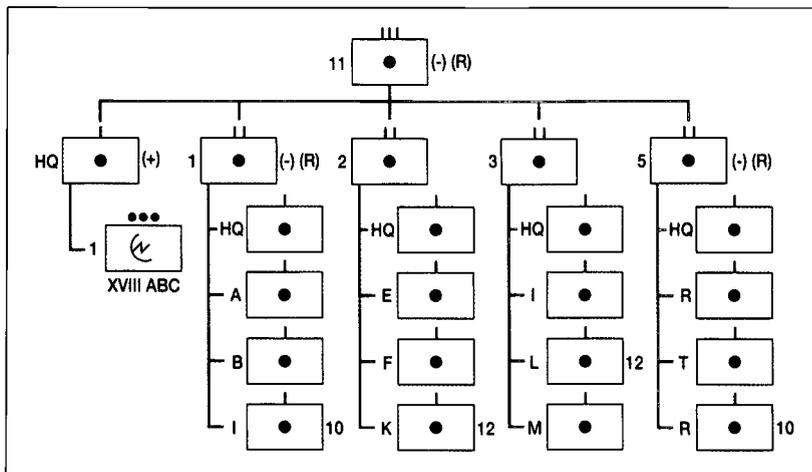


Figure 1. 11th Marines Task Organization. The 1st Battalion, 11th Marines (1/11) and 5/11 were reinforcing (R).

(See the 11th Marines task organization in Figure 1.) In Kuwait, the regiment had a counter-battery radar (CBR) detachment from the 10th Marines attached—four Q-46A radars, a target processing center (TPC) and 23 Marines—as well as two batteries (I/3/10 and R/5/10). (The two batteries from the 12th Marines were in their six-month rotation with the 11th Marines as part of the routine unit deployment program.) Additionally, the 1st FA Detachment (1st FAD) from the Army’s XVIII Airborne Corps in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was attached, bringing two Q-37 radars, a TPC and 24 soldiers.

During February as the entire regiment slowly reassembled in Kuwait, the regiment maximized its time planning and rehearsing through a combination of CPXs and live-fire training. The regiment calibrated propellant lots on the MPF shipping and conducted a live-fire rehearsal of anticipated initial combat tasks.

By early March, the 11th Marines had integrated its attached units. On 5 March, the regiment occupied position areas in northern Kuwait to provide counter-battery support to the engineers conducting berm-clearing operations along the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border. On 19 March, the 1st Marine Division was ordered to move to attack positions in northern Kuwait.

Going into this operation, the 11th Marines Commanding Officer’s guidance to his staff and subordinate commanders was simple: “We must *kill* the enemy at every opportunity—no *pinpricks*.” His intent was equally succinct and left no doubt as to the 11th Marines’ purpose: “Protect the Marines and sailors of the 1st Marine Division from the effects of enemy indirect fire systems.”

These straightforward words resonated throughout the 11th Marines and were put into action during the 1st Marine Division’s attack from northern Kuwait to Al Kut, Baghdad and then Tikrit.

Early on 19 March, the 11th Marine Regiment occupied its tactical dispersal areas south of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border and made final preparations for the attack into southern Iraq. Task organized with its four organic cannon battalions, the additional CBR detachment from the 10th Marines and the 1st FAD, the regiment was reinforced by two British Army artillery units: the 7th Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) Regiment (18 L118 105-mm towed howitzers) and the 3d RHA (-) (16 AS-90 155-mm self-propelled howitzers).

Integrating these combined forces required detailed coordination to establish unique C² arrangements and assign tactical missions to exploit the British artillery’s capabilities and complement the division’s scheme of maneuver.

With 106 howitzers, six Q-46A radars, two Q-37 radars and more than 3,000 Marines, sailors and soldiers from two allied nations, the 11th Marines was prepared to support the 1st Marine Division’s “Opening Gambit.” This was the division’s simultaneous two-pronged attack to seize the Ar Rumaylah Oilfields with Regimental Combat Team 5 (RCT-5) in the west and destroy the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division with RCT-7 in the east, the latter the division’s main effort.

Opening Gambit. Early on 20 March, the 11th Marines occupied their initial position areas just south of the international border. While the remainder of the division occupied its attack positions, the regiment continued to provide counterbattery coverage across the division zone.

At 1132Z, the 11th Marines fired the first rounds of OIF in counterfire to Iraqi cross-border mortar fires. The regiment's response to the mortar fire—a two battalion fire-for-effect (FFE)—set the tone for the war.

H-Hour was planned for 0300Z on 21 March. At 1500 on 20 March, the division issued a fragmentary order (FRAGO) altering the timing of the attack. RCT-5 was to start its attack to seize the key gas-oil separation plants in the Ar Rumaylah Oilfields at 1730Z, nine and one-half hours earlier than planned. In response to this order, 1/11 and 2/11 displaced forward immediately to their planned firing positions.

At 1700Z, the 11th Marines initiated the 1st Division attack against the enemy with a 30-minute counterbattery program against the 51st Mechanized Division and III Corps Artillery defending the Ar Rumaylah Oilfields.

Because the weather conditions on 20 and 21 March reduced the number of close air support (CAS) sorties flown, the 11th Marines had to fill the gap in fire support. Firing at targets previously planned for aviation attacks, the regiment fired with deadly accuracy nearly non-stop throughout the night, destroying several high-payoff targets (HPTs). The HPTs included two Iraqi artillery D-30 battalions, a Type 59-1 battery, a regimental command post, armored vehicles, tanks and an entrenched infantry battalion.

The division FSCC played a key role in the unfolding fight, directing artillery on previously planned air targets and coordinating with the division collections officer for unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) coverage. The UAVs located the enemy artillery and armor formations, and the 11th massed multiple artillery battalions on the formations.

When RCT-7 crossed the line of departure (LD) at 0300Z on 21 March, the 11th Marines weighted the main effort with three battalions. Leapfrogging battalions to keep pace with RCT-7's tank and mechanized task forces, the regiment delivered unrelenting artillery fires with devastating effects, stripping the enemy defenders of their will to resist.

Within 24 hours, the 1st Marine Division had secured the critical oil infrastructure and rendered the 51st Mechanized Division ineffective—the 11th Marines had silenced the Iraqi artillery.

By nightfall on 22 March, the opening gambit was complete. No friendly forces suffered casualties due to indirect fire, the relief in place by the 1st Armor Division (United Kingdom) was complete, the 7th and 3d RHA Regiments reverted to the tactical control of the 1st Armor Division, and the 11th Marines were displacing west in preparation for the next attack.

Attack Across the Euphrates. On 23 March, the 1st Marine Division attacked across the Euphrates River on a movement-to-contact toward Ad Diwaniyah. By 24 March, sandstorms blinded the force and fuel was in short supply. Fedayeen forces engaged the halted division column all along Highway 1 east of Ad Diwaniyah.

Because visibility was near zero, the conditions prevented aviation from supporting the division. The 11th Marines were the only fire support available to protect the division's forward elements from mortar and surface attack.

For six days and nights, despite fatigue, severely worsening weather, countless enemy mortar attacks and constant probing by Fedayeen "death squads," the 11th Marines provided reactive counterbattery and suppressive fires all along the division's main supply route, Highway 1.

Attack Along Highway 7. Simultaneously, for the division's supporting attack up Highway 7, the regiment weighted 1/11 with a TPC and an additional radar to support RCT-1's attack in the east. This decision had an impact on the counterfire fight to the east as one Q-46A radar that routinely supported RCT-1 was down with mechanical problems; the additional radar had to serve as the sole counterfire "eyes."

Once the 11th Marines were within range of Al Kut, the regiment took the division fight to the Baghdad Republican Guard Division, destroying multiple artillery batteries, fortified positions and a regimental headquarters.

While the Division amassed adequate logistics to continue its attack to Baghdad, the 11th Marines coordinated with RCT-5, the division's lead regiment, to integrate 11th Marines units into its column for the attack north. Because of the narrow attack corridor and the length of the column, integrating the artillery with the mechanized

infantry and armor was the only way to ensure the artillery could range RCT-5's forward battalion.

This required the already fatigued regiment to move more aggressively and maintain the speed and flexibility of the mechanized infantry and tanks. The regimental headquarters integrated its forward and main COCs into the subordinate battalions' convoys and employed battalion clusters to maximize the limited terrain that was suitable for howitzers and trucks.

Due largely to this innovation on-the-fly, the 11th Marines consistently maintained at least two battalions within range to support the division's main effort in its attack across the Tigris River while fighting the Baghdad and Al Nida Republican Guard Divisions.

On 31 March, the division continued its attack toward Baghdad, seizing the Hantush Airstrip on Highway 1 to sustain subsequent attacks across the Tigris River toward Baghdad. The next day RCT-5 secured a vital crossing site over the Saddam Canal and, by 2 April, had seized the bridge across the Tigris River at An Numaniyah, a few kilometers east of Sabat.

Throughout this historic advance, the 11th Marines were directly behind the lead maneuver battalion with never less than two artillery battalions and six radars providing close support and counterbattery fires.

11th Marines Crosses the Tigris River. On 3 April, the division attacked to destroy the Baghdad Republican Guard Division at Al Kut. RCT-7 attacked from the west along Highway 6 north of the Tigris (supported by 3/11 and reinforced by 5/11), and RCT-1 fixed the enemy division from the south along Highway 7 (supported by 1/11).

When the battle was won, the main effort shifted back to RCT-5 as it sustained the division's advance toward Baghdad along Highway 6. Interspersed with RCT-5 were 2/11 in direct support (DS), 5/11 reinforcing 2/11, 3/11 in general support (GS) to the 1st Marine Division and the 11th Marines' forward and main COCs.

By 4 April, the 11th Marines had reassembled for the first time since 21 March. (1/11 had been DS to RCT-1 for its attack up Highway 7 to Al Kut and completed an arduous 200-kilometer road march to rejoin the regiment). Located less than four kilometers behind the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5) along Highway 6 and just east of the Diyala River, the entire regiment assembled in a four-kilometer area. The regiment was so close to 3/5 that it had to fire reduced charges to provide close support to the infantry battalion during its battle with the Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian "Jihadists" who stopped its advance.

To break through the enemy blocking force, RCT-5 broke contact with the dug-in enemy forces to allow a six-minute regimental mass mission using dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICM). This four-battalion fire mission disintegrated the battalion-sized enemy formation, reopened Highway 6 and allowed RCT-5 to regain the momentum. The mass mission also cleared the remaining enemy forces in zone, thus opening the route for the rest of the 1st Marine Division to advance to the eastern approaches to Baghdad on 5 April.

Artillery Adaptability in Baghdad. As the Division established its cordon around the city, the 11th Marines continued to provide counterbattery fires against the Iraqi artillery, firing from within the open areas in the city (stadiums, racetracks, roadways and military complexes). To minimize collateral damage to noncombatants and civilian infrastructure, many of the radar-acquired targets were passed exclusively to aviation to engage with precision munitions using the quick-fire TTP the regiment established before the operation.

In another innovation, the COC used high-resolution imagery to check for the potential of collateral damage before initiating counterfire missions.

Artillery targets became fewer, and by 11 April, the 11th Marines headquarters and two battalions, 1/11 and 3/11, were in the city conducting security and stability operations and establishing the 1st Marine Division civil-military operations center (CMOC).

Also on 11 April, 5/11 was ordered to support Task Force Tripoli's attack to Tikrit, 170 kilometers north of Baghdad. To support the operation, two Q-46A radars and a TPC were attached to 5/11 to provide target acquisition. In the ensuing seven-day operation, the battalion fired 36 counterbattery missions against enemy mortars and artillery and confirmed the destruction of two D-30 batteries defending the city.

Upon entering Baghdad, the 11th Marines gained two additional tasks not typically assigned to an artillery regiment: establish the 1st Marine Division CMOC and establish its own zone in which to conduct security and stability operations. The 11th Marines approached these new tasks with the same gusto and professionalism it had when preparing to cross the LD 22 days earlier.

Security and Stability Ops. The regimental headquarters immediately established two command posts: one in the 11th Marines' zone to command and control security and stabilization operations in the 11th Marines sector and a second at the Palestine Hotel in downtown Baghdad where the CMOC would operate.

In the 11th Marines zone, the regiment's task was to restore order and help ease suffering. Within 24 hours, the zone was greatly improved and 1/11 and 3/11 were in the community conducting patrols, removing weapons caches, detaining looters and showing the Iraqi people that Americans were not conquerors, but liberators. Throughout it all, the 11th Marines still maintained a firing capability to support in and around the city.

The 11th Marines Commanding Officer was assigned as the Civil-Military Operations Coordinator for the 1st Marine Division, and he set the tone for accomplishing the daunting challenges in Baghdad. He had daily meetings with the RCT commanders, 3d Civil Affairs Group liaison detachment, civic leaders, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, CARE, Doctors Without Borders, etc.), and former Iraqi government officials. He organized the CMOC into functional departments to focus the humanitarian efforts in east Baghdad, the 1st Marine Division's area of responsibility.

The priorities of work were security, electrical power, water and medical support. Each day the CMOC accomplished more, achieving small victories to improve the situation in Baghdad.

Working with RCTs 1 and 7, the 11th Marines began providing security at key locations within the city (hospitals, government ministries, power plants, the banking district, and food and medical storage warehouses). This prevented looting of critical supplies and provided a secure environment for Iraqi citizens to return to work and help in the recovery effort. Policemen who returned were incorporated into a "ride along" program with Marines with positive results.

Water. Daily fuel convoys delivered fuel to fill the generator tanks that pump fresh water from northern watersheds to help provide clean water to the 6.5 million residents of Baghdad.

In Saddam City, where a large Shi'ite population resides, the water infrastructure had to be reinforced with water storage bladders to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. The 11th Marines' logistics train delivered in excess of 55,000 gallons of fresh water made by Combat Service Support Group 11 (CSSG-11).

Key Infrastructure. The CMOC coordinated convoy escort for key infrastructure personnel and support agencies (electrical engineers, medical personnel and NGO/private volunteer organizations) to assess electrical power plants, water treatment facilities, telephone switching centers and hospitals.

Explosive Ordnance Clean Up. 11th Marines coordinated the division's explosive ordnance retrieval and disposal. It established an ordnance storage site at the Rasheed Military Complex and a disposal site that destroyed several hundred tons of ordnance recovered in the division's zone.

The conditions in Baghdad began to improve.

Taking Tikrit. The 11th Marines steadily coordinated its own "three-block war" for 11 days with one battalion fighting with Task Force Tripoli at Tikrit, one supporting RCT-5 north of the city and two battalions conducting security in zone. The regiment's remaining resources were fully engaged in the humanitarian efforts throughout east Baghdad.

On 21 April, the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) relieved the 1st Marine Division in Baghdad with the ACR's civil affairs (CA) assuming the duties as CMOC in east Baghdad. The next day, 3-7 Infantry conducted a relief-in-place with the 11th Marines, and by 23 April, the 11th Marines were in the division assembly area at Ad Diwaniyah, awaiting guidance on MPF reconstitution and redeployment.

During OIF, the 11th Marines provided complete fire support to the 1st Marine Division. The results of the 32-day campaign bear witness to the devastatingly accurate fires and decisive impact the regiment had on the enemy—and the equally positive impact the regiment had on the people of Baghdad while conducting civil-military operations.

The effectiveness of the 11th Marines as the division's counterfire shield was significant with few casualties due to enemy indirect fires—a testament to the regiment's pre-war foresight, professionalism and battle leadership.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Marines, soldiers, and sailors of the 11th Marines wrote a new chapter in the long and proud history of Marine Corps Artillery support.



Marine Artillery in the Battle of An Nasiriyah

by Major Walker M. Field

Field Artillery Journal, November-December 2003.

According to intelligence reports, An Nasiriyah, a city in south central Iraq, would present little military resistance to the Coalition Forces' rapid advance toward Baghdad. Instead, Regimental Combat Team-2 (RCT-2) encountered an extremely violent confrontation with an enemy force occupying complex urban terrain. What followed was a fiercely fought eight-day urban battle against a large concentration of paramilitary forces and remnants of the Iraqi 11th Infantry Division, both of whom were determined to exact a heavy toll of Coalition casualties and retain control of the city.

From the initial fire mission on the morning of 23 March to the final mission fired in support of Task Force 20's rescue of Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch, the Marine Artillery of 1st Battalion (Reinforced), 10th Marines (1/10) provided RCT-2's only all-weather, long-range, continuous fire support. The battalion fired more than 2, 100 rounds in this short period, enabling RCT-2 to seize and secure the eastern bridges of the city, thus opening a vital line of communications (LOCs) through which elements of the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) could continue the fight north to Baghdad.

This article provides a brief overview of the task organization, sequence of events and artillery specific-lessons identified by 1/10 from a battle that can be characterized as a military operation in urban terrain (MOUT).

Overview. 1/10 deployed from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to Kuwait in January 2003 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The battalion then deployed to Iraq in March in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). 1/10 was attached to RCT-2, 2d Marine Infantry Regiment.

RCT-2 was a reinforced motorized and mechanized infantry regiment consisting of two motorized medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) infantry battalions, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines (2/8) and 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (3/2); one reinforced mechanized amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) infantry battalion, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines (1/2); a light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company; and a recon company. RCT-2's higher headquarters was the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB), designated Task Force Tarawa (TF Tarawa) upon arrival in Kuwait.

1/10 received the official deployment order on 31 December 2002 to deploy in support of OEF. The order directed the battalion's four batteries (Headquarters, A, B and C), a counterbattery radar detachment (CBR) with two Q-46A radars and a target processing center (TPC), and a heavy engineer squad from the 10th Marine Artillery Regiment deploy with 1/10. Via amphibious ships, the battalion sailed for the Persian Gulf and arrived at Kuwait Naval Base on 15 February. The battalion immediately moved inland to Camp Shoup within Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) Coyote (I MEF's logistical support area, or LSA) and established its base of operations. From 20 February until 19 March, 1/10 focused on combat training and equipment maintenance.

The battalion deployed from Camp Shoup on the morning of 20 March for an assembly area along the northwestern border of Kuwait and Iraq, its final destination before starting offensive combat operations. The 1st Marine Division was on TF Tarawa's right flank while the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) (3d ID) was on the left.

On 21 March, 12 hours behind the lead elements of the 3d ID, RCT-2 crossed the border obstacle belt into Iraq. Following a route parallel but slightly east of the 3d ID's route, RCT-2 moved north toward the Al Luhays Oil Facility located southeast of Jalibah Airfield.

1/10 assumed a "desert wedge" formation consisting of three battery columns abreast, each with an element of headquarters battery in trace. It moved behind 1/2 and in front of 3/2. TF Tarawa's mission was to occupy initial defensive positions to enable the 3d ID to clear through Jalibah Airfield.

The next morning, 1/10 continued north and occupied firing positions just north of Jalibah Airfield. That afternoon, the CBR detachment repeatedly detected counterfire targets originating from the same location.

Gaining RCT-2 approval, the battalion engaged the target. As a result of 1/10's first fire mission in OIF, CBR received no further detections from that vicinity, and 42 Iraqi Regular Army soldiers surrendered to a nearby LAR unit.

That evening, after TF Tarawa consolidated at Jalibah, it was directed to conduct a relief in place of 3d ID forces in the vicinity of Tallil Airfield and the Highway 1 bridge across the Euphrates River west of Nasiriyah. TF Tarawa also issued orders to RCT-2 to move forces northwest toward Nasiriyah and be prepared to continue the attack to seize and secure the eastern bridges across the Euphrates River and the Saddam Canal within the city of An Nasiriyah.

Battle for An Nasiriyah: 23 March–2 April. On the morning of 23 March, 1/10 moved in trace of RCT-2's lead element (1/2) when it began receiving indirect and direct fire from covered positions to the east and west of Highway 7, the main road leading into southern Nasiriyah. 1/10 quickly emplaced in restricted terrain and began processing fire missions. Simultaneously, 1/10 provided medical aid to soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company who had been ambushed in the city and were moving south along Highway 7.

The battle continued throughout the day as 1/10's batteries bounded forward, firing a number of fire-for-effect (FFE) and adjust fire missions in support of infantry companies in contact. The battalion also continued to engage radar-generated targets, totaling five missions and firing 108 dual-purpose improved conventional munition (DPICM) rounds. While actively processing fire missions, Bravo Battery's main body received incoming mortar fire, forcing the battery to conduct an emergency displacement.

During the afternoon of 23 March, the battalion was reinforced with fires from India Battery, 3/10 (attached to 1/11). 1/11 was southeast of the city awaiting orders to either pass through RCT-2 in Nasiriyah or bypass the city to the west.

Dawn on 24 March found RCT-2 heavily engaged throughout Nasiriyah in urban combat operations. 1/10 displaced farther north within the outskirts of the city to achieve a greater range fan north of the Saddam Canal. Proficient azimuth of fire management was critical, as RCT-2's mechanized battalion (1/2) remained north of the city while the two motorized battalions (3/2 and 2/8) operated principally south of the city.

1/10 had to carefully position itself to balance its fire support. The battalion had to be close enough to the city to provide fires well north in support of 1/2, which was about 14 to 30 kilometers from 1/10, but not too close to preclude its supporting the two motorized battalions operating in the southern portion of the city, about five kilometers north of 1/10.

As the fighting intensified, scores of the enemy and indigenous displaced personnel poured out of the city to the south. As a result, the battalion processed a number of enemy prisoners of war (EPWs) and redirected numerous displaced persons.

Although the two motorized battalions were less than five kilometers to the north, an industrial corridor where paramilitary forces could freely maneuver was within the noncontiguous battlespace. Thus, 1/10 was exposed to civilian and enemy foot and vehicle traffic on all sides.

Each of the batteries was responsible for security in all directions. Although well-equipped and trained to perform this mission, it was difficult to man 360-degree security while also processing fire missions 24 hours a day. As the battle raged on, the battalion implemented the firebase concept to economize the security effort and better contend with displaced personnel and EPWs.

On the afternoon of 24 March (35 hours after the attack began), the battalion received its first artillery ammunition resupply of 120 high-explosive (HE) and 100 DPICM rounds per battery. 1/10 had had a significant shortage of HE and had been forced to fire rocket-assisted projectiles (RAP) in the rocket-off mode with Charge Three green bag in lieu of HE.

Just as the ammunition resupply arrived, the remainder of 1/11 arrived to provide forward passage of line (FPOL) and reinforcing fires. The decision had been made to pass RCT-1 through the city north toward Al Kut on Highway 7. The FPOL took a number of hours, and 1/11 supported the passage with reinforcing fires until it was ordered to move north of the city. Although 1/11 provided reinforcing fires to RCT-2 and fires for the FPOL of RCT-1, 1/11 remained in direct support (DS) of RCT-1 and never officially assumed the role of reinforcing (R) to 1/10.

Deploying with 1/11 was Battery G from the 6th Parachute Brigade (UK), an M118 (105-mm) battery with an Arthur radar. This brought the total number of Coalition howitzers trained on Nasiriyah to 42. 1/10 remained the controlling fire direction center (FDC) for all artillery fires in Nasiriyah.

Through the night of the 24th of March, RCT-1 attacked north along Highway 7 to continue the fight toward Al Kut with 1/11 following in support. Battery G remained with 1/10 until first light on 25 March before returning to its unit to prepare for action in Basrah. Battery G and 1/11 expended more than 200 rounds during the night in support of RCT-2's and RCT-1's FPOL.

The fight for Nasiriyah continued with ferocity on the 25th as numerous fire missions were processed during the morning. In a raging windstorm, an enemy T-55 tank dug in to the east of Highway 7 attempted to ambush a 2/8 combined anti-armor team (CAAT) patrol. The wind and dust prevented 2/8 from engaging the enemy tank by anti-tank missile (TOW) or air support, so the patrol initiated a FFE mission to destroy the dug-in tank. Battery C rose to the challenge and destroyed the tank using DPICM.

In the most demanding combat conditions, the artillery once again proved to be the *only* all-weather continuous fire support asset for TF Tarawa.

As if the enemy had been reinvigorated by the sandstorm and heavy overnight rains, on 26 March the urban battle increased in intensity and lethality and proved to be the most prolific day of artillery firing in the battle for An Nasiriyah. Around noon on the 26th, the battalion fired suppressive HE rounds with concrete-piercing fuzes into a hospital that was serving as a paramilitary strongpoint. This fire enabled 2/8 seize the building.

Throughout the battle, aerial reconnaissance reported a number of mortar and artillery pieces in a garrison gun park.

The Iraqi regular forces gave the impression they were capitulating, having staged their equipment in accordance with terms of surrender. By 26 March it was clear the Iraqi paramilitary forces and regular army elements were firing the "surrendered" weapon systems and then quickly vacating the positions and hiding until they wanted to fire another mission.

With unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) now on station, TF Tarawa provided accurate, real-time targeting of many of the staged weapon systems. Receiving fire missions from the UAVs and aerial forward observers (FOs) via the RCT-2 fire support coordination center (FSCC), 1/10 prosecuted more than 15 fire missions on the afternoon of the 26th, destroying two Type 59-1 batteries and three D-30 batteries.

As RCT-2 fought in the streets and within neighborhoods of Nasiriyah, CBR continued to detect enemy indirect fire originating from the vicinity of a railroad station in the southern portion of the city. Both US Army Special Forces and human intelligence (HUMINT) sources verified the target as a paramilitary assembly area containing an estimated 1,000 irregular forces. Adding this information to the many radar-detected targets originating from the same location seemed to confirm the validity of the target. The final corroboration came in the form of a report by an element of the 2d Radio Battalion (RADBN) indicating not only that the assembly area existed, but also that the enemy numbered up to 2,000 and was preparing to launch a counterattack. The fire mission, a battalion-10 rounds of DPICM, yielded an estimated 200 enemy dead and broke up the coordinated enemy counterattack. Referring to this mission, the commanding general of TF Tarawa credited the artillery with being instrumental in breaking the back of the enemy defending Nasiriyah.

The morning of 27 March found 1/10 consolidating defensively into a battalion firebase. The firing position was an oval-shaped position one kilometer in diameter with 42 crew-served weapons and five Avenger anti-air defense vehicles protecting it. The battalion christened the defensive firing position Firebase Pokorney in honor of First Lieutenant Fred E. Pokorney, Jr., a forward observer from 1/10 killed in action on 23 March while calling in artillery fires on the enemy just north of the Saddam Canal.

Throughout the morning, the battalion processed sporadic fire missions and conducted security and reconnaissance patrols around the firebase. Having reached a crescendo on 26 March, the number of missions and enemy forces being engaged was reduced significantly for the remainder of the month.

On 28 March, RCT-2 directed 1/10 to form a task force to reinforce and secure the Highway 1 bridge over the Euphrates River. The mission was important as Highway 1 was the main supply route for I MEF forces advancing north to Baghdad. Commanded by the battalion executive officer, TF Rex (for the King of Battle)

numbered more than 300 personnel with Bravo Battery forming the core of the task force as its provisional infantry.

During the last three days of March, the battalion fired three counterfire missions and five adjust fire battalion mass missions in support of 2/8's and 3/2's clearing of pockets of resistance throughout the city. Of the counterfire missions, one resulted in the destruction of a Type 59-1 battery actively firing on 2/8.

On 1 April, Army Special Forces conducted a raid to recover PFC Jessica Lynch, a member of the US Army's 507th Maintenance Company convoy ambushed on 23 March. Battery C fired deception fires in support of the mission, destroying a suspected enemy command post and arms cache as a diversion for the Special Forces. This mission was the last fired by 1/10 in the Battle for Nasiriyah.

During the next three weeks, RCT-2 expanded its battlespace north along Highways 1 and 7. Moving from city to city in search of pockets of resistance and protecting 1st Marine Division's LOC (the MEF's main effort), the battalion traveled more than 700 kilometers.

The combat highlight of this period occurred when RCT-2 was ordered to force the capitulation of the 10th Armored Division in southeast Iraq near Al Amarah. As 1/10 deployed in front of the mechanized battalion but in trace of a LAR company, RCT-2 conducted a movement-to-contact east of Qalat Sakar toward Al Amarah, a maneuver that caused the 10th Division to capitulate.

Returning to An Nasiriyah as RCT-2 began setting the conditions for Phase IV of OIF, 1/10 organized and operated as provisional infantry from 23 April until 12 May. 1/10 established traffic control points, secured a petroleum distribution facility and provided point security of the Highway 1 bridge.

1/10 then began to retrograde by infiltration back to Kuwait for redeployment by amphibious ships, with the last elements departing An Nasiriyah on 12 May.

Lessons Learned. 1/10 identified a number of lessons learned during OIF and has submitted an official compilation in Marine Corps lessons learned (MCLLS) format. The following are a few of the lessons specific to an artillery-supported MOUT battle and applicable to all towed artillery units.

Towed Artillery Keeping Up with Mechanized Infantry. Considering the speed and mobility of the modern main battle tank and armored personnel carriers, some doubted towed artillery's ability to keep pace with mechanized maneuver elements. In the June 2003 *Marine Corps Gazette*, Lieutenant Colonel Clark wrote, "In today's fast paced, fluid maneuver environment, a towed [artillery] system is simply unrealistic." This was clearly refuted during RCT-2's movement over most of central and eastern Iraq; towed artillery proved more than capable of providing accurate, timely fire support in movement-to-contacts that often exceeded 100 kilometers.

Although the M1A1 tank and AAV have greater rates of march over unimproved surfaces than a towed artillery piece, they had to allow their resupply vehicles to keep pace with them. The logistics vehicles necessary to sustain mechanized forces are wheeled, like that of a howitzer prime mover. Although there are logistic variants of the tank and AAV, they can't serve as a stand-alone combat service support (CSS) element for their respective units over a sustained period of time.

Tanks and AAVs need dedicated CSS elements to provide replenishment, replacement, refitting and refueling of the bulk supplies associated with mechanized forces. Planning considerations and movement rates are tempered to accommodate sustaining the force logistically.

Also, the debilitating effects of moving wheeled systems great distances in a very hot climate, even over roads with improved surfaces, caused RCT-2's rate of march rarely to exceed 25 kilometers per hour.

1/10's experience in OIF illustrated that, in spite of the inherent raw speed of mechanized vehicles, towed artillery is more than capable of keeping up with mechanized forces.

Artillery Ammunition Apportionment in an Urban Fight. RCT-2's battle in An Nasiriyah was, for the most part, an MOUT fight. Before departing Camp Shoup on 20 March, the initial issue of artillery ammunition was based on a combat planning factor of a composite enemy threat (armor and infantry) and included a much greater mix of "long shooters" than HE munitions—RAP and base bleed DPICM (BBDPICM).

Would a different mix of ammunition have been requested if an urban fight were anticipated? Yes, but based on what planning factor? The primary source for ammunition planning, *Marine Corps Order (MCO)*

8010.1E Class V(W) Planning Factors for Fleet Marine Force Combat Operations, depicts ammunition allocations based on enemy composition (armor- or infantry-specific or a composite of each) rather than terrain, such as the urban environment of An Nasiriyah.

Figure 1 depicts the artillery ammunition 1/10 was issued before going into An Nasiriyah—the battalion’s “go to war ammo.” This allocation equaled one combat load (CL) and one day of ammunition (DOA) at the assault rate, based on a conventional composite threat.

Figure 2 shows the percentages of ammo that 1/10 actually expended during OIF, 99 percent of which was fired during the battle in An Nasiriyah from 23 to 29 March. 1/10 fired primarily HE in urban operations.

The ammunition allocation percentages derived from the battle of An Nasiriyah could serve as a basis to initiate a planning template for future artillery MOU engagements.

Resurrection of the Firebase. It was apparent in An Nasiriyah that the non-contiguous nature of the battlefield, namely the battalion’s exposure on all sides, would necessitate economizing the local security effort of each battery. Based on a prevailing enemy threat consisting of paramilitary forces with limited indirect fire capability and no air assets, the battalion consolidated into a firebase.

A firebase is defined as an area in hostile territory that requires a 360-degree defense and supports combat patrols or larger operations with combat support and CSS assets.² Due to the ground threat, wide dispersion of the batteries was traded for berming and hardening. Fighting positions with overhead cover for crew-served weapons were prepared, exterior and interior berms created and the interior LOCs maximized by wiring-in every element.

During the Battle for An Nasiriyah, the Marines of 1/10 (Reinforced) distinguished themselves by providing continuous fire support to RCT-2 forces. Through driving sandstorms and torrential rains, artillery repeatedly affirmed itself as an all-weather, long-range fire support capability. Artillery fire effectively destroyed the enemy’s major indirect fire assets and his ability to influence the battle.

In only eight days of fighting, the battalion processed 112 fire missions while expending more than 2,100 rounds. Counterbattery radar was invaluable to maneuver commanders as “Red Rain” (radar missions) accounted for 30 percent of all fire missions. 1/10 was credited with having broken the enemy’s back in the Battle for An Nasiriyah—maneuver endorsement of the effectiveness of Marine artillery in an urban environment.

¹ Lieutenant Colonel J.E. Clark, “What is the Future of Field Artillery in the Expeditionary Warfare Environment?” *Marine Corps Gazette*, 86, No. 6 (June 2003), 14.

² *Field Manual 101-5 Operational Terms and Graphics* Marine Corps Reference Publication No. MCRP 5-2A (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the United States Marine Corps, 30 September 1997).





‘Alone and Unafraid’

by Jim Landers

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The Marines’ 2d Tank Battalion used speed and armor to make quick work of Saddam Hussein’s regime

AL AZIZIY AH, Iraq—The Iraqis fired rocket-propelled grenades from behind a taxi parked along a distant canal. One grenade zipped across the nose of an armored amphibious vehicle and exploded in the dirt.

That angered Maj. Andrew Bianca, executive officer of the Marines’ 2nd Tank Battalion. Sheathed in aluminum plate, the tracked amphibious vehicles known as amtracks can withstand rifle fire, but not rocket grenades. And Maj. Bianca’s support team was in amtracks. He ordered his tank crew to fire a round at the Iraqis.

The 120 mm cannon barrel dropped slightly, then erupted with smoke and flame. The noise ripped the air so violently that Marines standing in an amtrack behind the tank were knocked off balance.

A cloud of dirt appeared behind the taxi. The shell had gone through the taxi’s open windows. But shrapnel from the round finished the Iraqis, and a finger of black smoke and flame soon rose from the taxi.

The tank column resumed its march to Baghdad.

For Marines and Army soldiers fighting throughout southern Iraq, this was their war: armored columns blasting through urban ambushes.

Air Force and Navy bombers made it impossible for the Iraqis to fight effectively with tanks and artillery. So when the Iraqis chose to fight, they hid in buildings and alleyways with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

The 2nd Tank Battalion started several fights with these urban opponents. Speed mattered more than body counts or seized ground. Using tanks to punch through enemy ambushes put the Marines closer to Baghdad and Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Lt. Col. Mike Oehl, the battalion’s commanding officer, put it to his officers this way: “Speed is the essence of this endeavor.” He was talking about a planned raid, but the remark held true for the battalion’s mission in the war.

“It’s hard to know what our part was in the overall war, but I’d like to think we made it a shorter war because we got here so quickly,” Col. Oehl said when his unit reached Baghdad.

No single unit won the war with Iraq. The 2nd Tank Battalion out of Camp Lejeune, N.C., brought 44 tanks, 249 other vehicles and 975 Marines to a fight spread across almost 300,000 U.S.,

British and Australian men and women. The 2nd Tank Battalion suffered five killed and dozens wounded; other units saw more fighting and suffered more casualties.

Yet several analysts agreed that the battalion exemplified the strategy and tactics that toppled Mr. Hussein in just three weeks of warfare.

“Armor played an incredibly important role,” said Marine Lt. Col. Dale Davis, director of international programs at the Virginia Military Institute. “The real objective was not the destruction of the Iraqi military but the unseating of the regime, and these flying columns, at the end, were key to causing the regime to collapse.”

New life for the tank

Just a few years ago, the Marine Corps was so anxious to fund a new generation of aviation and amphibious equipment, it was willing to give up its tanks. Both Army and Marine Corps strategists argued that attack helicopters and helicopter-borne infantry forces were the machines needed for fast attacks.

The war gave armor advocates new life. The Army’s one major attack with Apache helicopters went awry when the Iraqis, alerted that the helicopters were coming, shot up most of the force using rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire.

“We’re going to keep the tank, and it will be highly useful,” said Kenneth Estes, author of *Marines Under Armor* and a retired lieutenant colonel. “Commandants and others who would like it to go away because of its monstrous budget, I’m sorry. If you are ever going to fight someone who is a serious opponent, you are going to have to have the tank again.”

The 2nd Battalion’s tanks traveled inland more than 500 miles from the shores of Kuwait to the streets of Tikrit, Mr. Hussein’s hometown—farther than any battalion in Marine Corps history, said Lt. Gen. Earl B. Hailston, commander of Marine Forces at Central Command. They fought in Baghdad, Al Aziziyah and four other towns and villages in the 26 days it took for one of the battalion’s companies to reach Tikrit.

Their main weapon was the M1A1 Abrams tank.

The Abrams has a 120 mm cannon and three machine guns. It was designed in the 1970s to give the Army tanks that were superior to anything in the Soviet arsenal.

The Russians developed the T-72 and T-84 tanks with a 125 mm cannon, and the T-72 became the main battle tank of Iraq’s Republican Guards. But the Abrams fires a high-velocity round that the Marines say is superior to the Soviet-designed 125 mm cannon. Some Abrams rounds are made with depleted uranium that is so dense it burns through layers of tank armor before exploding inside an enemy armored vehicle.

Firepower makes tanks the battleships of land warfare. Unlike the warships of old, the Abrams does not need several range-finding shots to find its target. The tank’s “ballistic solution” computer is so precise, the first shot usually finds its mark, tank gunners say. The same targeting excellence holds for the tank’s .50-caliber “co-ax” machine gun mounted beside the cannon.

About halfway along the barrel rests a thick pad called a “bore evacuator” that allows air to rush inside to fill the vacuum created when a shell is fired. Tankers paint names for their tanks on the bore evacuators.

Col. Oehl’s crew named its tank “Deadly Mariah” and animated the name with an angry cloud blowing swords from its mouth. Maj. Bianca’s tank crew reached back to Greek mythology for the name “Two Furies”—anger and vengeance, minus the third fury, jealousy, which seemed out of place in Iraq.

An Abrams tank makes little room for its four-man crew. The driver is beneath the cannon barrel, by himself toward the front of the tank. He lies on a tilted bench and peers outside through thick prisms.

The gunner sits in the well of the turret, using thermal sights that enable him to find targets emanating heat at night or during severe storms. To his left is the tank loader, who pulls shells from a rear compartment and feeds them into the cannon. He has a turret hatch above his head equipped with a machine gun.

The tank commander sits behind and above the gunner. During the Iraq war, a Marine tank commander usually fought with his head and shoulders exposed above the turret hatch, where he could see the battlefield and fire a .50-caliber machine gun.

The tank weighs 68 tons and is powered by a 1,500-horsepower jet turbine engine. From the perspective of an opposing foxhole, it is a dreadful machine. It shakes the earth. It can travel at speeds as high as 55 mph. The shock from its cannon blast is incapacitating to anyone standing (or cowering) before it.

'Bully of the battlefield'

"The bully of the battlefield," marveled Lance Cpl. Billy Peixotto, a tank driver with the battalion from McKinney.

The Army's 3rd Infantry Division fought with more tanks than the Marines, and led the way into Baghdad with armored assaults that showed Mr. Hussein and his sons no longer controlled the capital.

But while the Army has other armored and mechanized divisions, the Pentagon turned to the Marines to fight the eastern prong of the war as a second land army.

"They've been able to sell themselves better than the Army as the embodiment of the 'revolution in military affairs' that [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld wants," said Col. Davis. "They train and fight as a combined arms force, with maneuver and flexibility tactics."

The 2nd battalion spent most of the war at the tip of the Marines' spear. It came within three miles of Baghdad on April 4, after three days that destroyed what was left of the Al Nida Division of the Republican Guards. They cleared the way to Baghdad for the 1st Marine Division and killed a large number of Arab Muslim volunteers who heeded Osama bin Laden's call to come to Iraq to kill Americans.

In the 1991 Gulf War, the Marines played a secondary role in the land forces that reclaimed Kuwait, said Patrick Garrett, an analyst with the Alexandria, Va., online firm Globalsecurity.org.

"In the Gulf War, they were used largely as a deception—to make the Iraqis believe there'd be an amphibious landing," he said. "It was not as front and center as the Marines would have liked. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, they got rid of that shadow."

Mr. Garrett credits 12 years of intense training by the Marines in combining infantry, artillery, tanks and aircraft for overcoming doubts about their fighting ability.

The 2nd Battalion used such tactics from the onset of the war. As part of the 5th Marine Regiment, the battalion sprinted into Iraq during the night of March 20, eight hours ahead of schedule and well ahead of the rest of the U.S. forces poised to attack from Kuwait.

The regiment was ordered to strike first because of alarming (though faulty) intelligence about Iraqis firing their oil fields and placing 90 of their best tank near the border.

The battalion raced through the night in a swinging left hook from western Kuwait to the gates of Basra. Three companies of Abrams tanks charged into Iraq, along with four armored amphibious vehicles serving as tracked command posts. Platoons of Scouts and anti-tank missile teams in Humvees followed, along with the Fox Infantry Company in their amtracks.

That left 75 percent of the battalion's vehicles behind: the fuel trucks, the ambulances, and the trucks and Humvees carrying food, water, tents, ammunition and many of the other necessities of military life.

The Marine tanks outraced their communications lines, their supplies and even their air cover. Col. Oehl was reduced to sending e-mails by satellite phone to let regimental headquarters know where he was.

Col. Oehl put fuel bladders on each side of the tanks to stretch their range and lessen their dependence on supply lines. When the tanks started running low on fuel, they dropped the large black bladders under the tank treads and squeezed the precious fluid into their tanks as though it were toothpaste.

The column destroyed about 30 Iraqi vehicles that night, including 10 tanks, and broke all hope of reinforcements reaching the Iraqi defenders of the 51st Mechanized Division.

Col. Oehl's demand for speed was so relentless that the battalion left behind two disabled tanks and their crews. The crews were told to catch up as best they could and did not rejoin the battalion until it reached Baghdad.

Before the assault, the battalion's nickname was "Masters of the Iron Horse." At the gates of Basra, Master Gunnery Sgt. Frank Cordero suggested a new slogan: "Alone and unafraid."

Lighter, quicker

The Marines take pride in their reputation for having lighter and quicker supply lines than the Army. The 2nd Battalion exemplified this as well, though it came with a price.

The sand and dust storm on March 26 obliterated all that was even vaguely familiar about the Marines' war machines. An orange glow backlit the walls of dirt whipping across the barren Iraqi landscape. Before long,

even the light disappeared as the storm swallowed all trace of the afternoon sun.

The Marines hunkered down for fitful naps. A thunderstorm broke around 9:30 p.m., and the rain fell as mud.

Col. Oehl left regimental headquarters in the black storm to head back to the battalion in a Humvee. His eyes were glued to his Magellan GPS satellite compass. He was yelling directions above the noise of the storm so his driver, unable to see a thing, could precisely retrace the 16 miles.

The meeting at 5th Regiment headquarters ended with commanders uncertain how to get back to their units, let alone when they might resume the race to Baghdad.

It was the low point of the war. Victory was just a couple of weeks away, and the miles between the Marines and Baghdad would soon fly by like laps at a NASCAR race. On this night, though, weather and exhaustion brought the Marines to a standstill.

"In retrospect, the sandstorm was very fortuitous for the U.S. forces," said Col. Davis. "Had the sandstorm not occurred, we would have still had to take that pause. . . . People who said there was no supply problem were talking bull. We were very extended."

The emphasis on speed put tremendous demands on the tank battalion's supply lines. The Marines carrying fuel, food, ammo and water went several days without any sleep as they chased the tanks in their long, balky convoys.

Before the war's end, the tank crews were limited to two meals a day, and some days it was just one. Once, Marines guarding the battalion's command vehicles were down to just 30 rounds of M-16 ammo apiece.

Fuel was the most crucial supply throughout the war. The tank uses the same jet turbine engine used in the Army's Apache helicopters. The tank consumes eight gallons of fuel just to start its engine.

The race to Baghdad left no time to spare, even for topping off the fuel tanks.

"We were still refueling while we were leaving," Col. Oehl said just before the sandstorm. "We're pushing the envelope. We really are. The only thing that's going to give us that rest is if something happens up north [to Mr. Hussein]. We really need to stop here at some point and get our senses and see what tanks have issues."

Capt. Dave Bardorf of Middletown, R.I., was the officer responsible for moving supplies to the tanks. He was awake for four days in a row before the sandstorm brought the battalion to a halt and gave him a chance to sleep.

"You make yourself uncomfortable to stay awake," he said. "You tighten the strap on your Kevlar [helmet]."

In the darkness, behind night-vision goggles that illuminated a two-dimensional green-and-black landscape, Capt. Bardorf found himself hallucinating.

"I was staring through the night-vision goggles and telling the driver, 'Stay straight. Watch that hill. There's a ditch on the right.' And the driver was yelling, 'Captain, Captain!' I told him, 'Yeah, just stay straight.' He shook my shoulder and told me we'd been stopped for five minutes."

The dust, lightning and mud gave Capt. Bardorf a chance to sleep. He woke up the next day "feeling like a million bucks."

Maj. Pat Cox, the commanding officer of a Marine reserve company attached to 2nd Tanks as Delta Company, had a grimmer perspective. Lance Cpl. Eric Orłowski, 26, of Buffalo, N.Y., died when another Marine accidentally tripped the trigger of a .50-caliber machine gun on March 24. The major believed that fatigue—to both men and machines—played a role in Cpl. Orłowski's death.

"We're trying to make this a second land army, and it ain't working out too well," he said.

The battalion was consciously trading fatigue for speed.

"The Marines believe speed is a casualty saver," said Mr. Estes. "It may look chaotic, and worse, but you upset the enemy plan by showing up faster than anyone anticipated. It allows you to take advantage of the chaos that exists on his side."

Aggressive commanders

Central Command's Gen. Tommy Franks wanted aggressive commanders who would move their units with speed and mobility.

One of the 1st Marine Division's regimental commanders was replaced during the war. The Marines offered no official explanation, but the talk among officers in the field was that the commander and his operations officer had not been aggressive enough.

Before the war began, 1st Marine Division commander Maj. Gen. James Mattis held a press conference to explain his expectations.

"We can move very, very quickly," he said. "These boys were brought up in southern California [at Camp Pendleton]. They're fast on the freeway."

The Marines integrate their own air forces into their battle plans, including combat aircraft such as F-18 fighter-bombers, Harrier jets and Cobra attack helicopters.

All of these units train together. The Marines feel so strongly about integrating ground and air forces that their pilots spend a year with infantry and tank units as forward observers calling in air strikes.

Capt. Mike Shayne, a Cobra pilot who fought in Afghanistan, was a forward observer and tank cannon loader with the 2nd Battalion. A fellow Marine looked at Capt. Shayne's size 11 1/2 feet one day and nicknamed him "Krusty" (after the clown on *The Simpsons*). Krusty was painted on the side of the "Polish Knights" tank in the 2nd Battalion's Alpha Company.

Capt. Shayne watched glumly one afternoon as Cobra helicopters destroyed an Iraqi position while the tanks sat silent.

"I'm not having any fun right now, because I can't jump in the fight," he said.

Capt. Shayne and his tank crew soon had more fight than he'd seen in a Cobra when the 2nd Battalion led the Marines to Baghdad.

Col. Oehl had planned a reconnaissance raid to the bridges across the Saddam Canal and the Tigris River to see if they could support the 68-ton Abrams tanks.

Cobra helicopters, tanks, reconnaissance vehicles, infantry and engineers in amtracks, scout and anti-tank missile Humvees, and even mortar crews were to be in the column. The assault group was expected to move at an average speed of 30 mph, using all four lanes of an unfinished, divided highway.

But division headquarters canceled the raid. The 5th Regiment was advancing up a path that forced the Iraqis to concentrate their defenses on southern Baghdad. The Saddam Canal and the bridge over the Tigris at Al Numaniyah were well east of the regiment's position. A raid to those bridges would tell the Iraqis that the Marines' offensive was designed to hit Baghdad from the east.

Since the battalion and the rest of the 5th Regiment were ready to attack, Gen. Mattis instead ordered the regiment to head for Baghdad. Tanks would blast through the Iraqi defenses, followed by mechanized infantry units that would finish the job.

The attack seemed likely to result in a major battle with the Al Nida Republican Guard Division. Former Marine Col. Oliver North, a commentator covering the war for Fox Television, asked Col. Oehl if he could come along. Col. Oehl turned him down.

Iraqis overwhelmed

The attack began after midnight on April 2. The regiment's light-armored reconnaissance vehicles and infantry hit the Saddam Canal and overwhelmed the Iraqi defenders.

Engineers checked the bridge and declared it sound enough to handle the tanks. Now the heavier armored vehicles of the 2nd Battalion moved into the lead.

By the time the tanks reached Al Numaniyah, it was daylight. And the Iraqis had prepared a defense.

The Marine tank crews had no trouble dispatching about a dozen Iraqi T-54, T-55 and T-62 tanks. The Marines' Abrams also easily took out several BMPs—armored infantry vehicles with 73 mm anti-tank cannon.

But Iraqis in civilian clothes—a mix of Al Nida infantrymen and military volunteers with the Fedayeen Saddam—hid in the alleys and back streets of the city firing rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. The Marines' tanks responded with more than 160 rounds of cannon fire. It was the heaviest fighting the battalion had seen, and there were several close calls.

Capt. Bardorf was standing in the passenger door of his Humvee when an Iraqi rifleman shot off the side view mirror. The captain spun around with his M-16.

“He raised his head back up in the bunker to see if he’d hit me, and that was his mistake,” Capt. Bardorf said.

The bridge across the Tigris at Al Numaniyah is a high concrete span that looked suspect to Marine engineers who’d studied it from aerial photos. The tank commanders had been told to cross one at a time to prevent a collapse from the weight of the tanks.

While waiting to cross, one of the tanks was hit in the rear engine compartment by an Iraqi firing a rocket-propelled grenade. The grenade disabled the tank, and uncovered the Abrams’ Achilles heel.

Such a grenade aimed at the rear of an M1A1 can damage the engine and stop the tank. It was a lesson the Iraqis learned well enough to use again when the 2nd Battalion reached Baghdad.

The battle of Al Numaniyah continued for two more days as the 5th Regiment’s infantry companies took over from the tanks. The battalion suffered no casualties in its share of the fight, however, and it was 60 miles closer to Baghdad.

White flags, cheering

The battalion fought again the next day, on April 3. The plan was to attack Al Nida troops defending the Basra-to-Baghdad highway at Zubaydiyah and Al Aziziyah and halt a little farther up the highway.

Col. Oehl led one part of the battalion, and Maj. Bianca, the battalion’s second in command, followed with the rest of the column around 11 a.m.

The column was startled by a convoy of Iraqis waving white flags and headscarves out the windows of their cars and darting in and out of the tank column.

The Iraqis were cheering the advance of the Americans.

At Al Aziziyah, however, the column once again ran into a maelstrom of grenades and small arms fire. Iraqi snipers were starting to aim at the Marine tank commanders and amtrack crews who stood up through the turrets of their vehicles.

Capt. Jon Lauder of Hastings, Minn., had placed sandbags around his turret hatch after the fight at Al Numaniyah. He dug a bullet out of one of the bags after the fight at Al Aziziyah.

“I’m a big believer in sandbags tonight,” he said.

Capt. Todd Sudmeyer, commander of the Battalion’s Alpha Company, led the way through Al Aziziyah. At the point where 5th Regiment commander Col. Joe Dumford wanted the tanks to stop, Capt. Sudmeyer kept going—looking, he said, for a suitable bivouac spot.

When Col. Dumford heard the tanks were six miles past the point where he wanted to halt, he growled over the battalion radio. “I’m going to have to put a bit in the Iron Horse,” he said.

The tanks continued up the highway until they reached an Iraqi military camp. Surprised Iraqi troops opened fire, only to have their barracks blasted by the tanks.

Capt. Lauder jumped from his vehicle and ran to the rooftop of the Iraqi headquarters. He tore down the Iraqi flag flying from a pole.

“That’s going home right next to the Japanese Zero my grandfather got,” he said.

The battalion came through the fighting with only one injury requiring medical evacuation. First Lt. Matt Zummo, commanding officer of the battalion’s Scout Platoon, took shrapnel in his arm and torso when a rocket-propelled grenade hit his Humvee.

“Lt. Zummo was reluctant to leave, but he’d had a lucky day. The grenade hit the Humvee’s antenna, which deflected it into a box at the back of the vehicle housing a laser range finder, which absorbed most of the blast.

“We never had much use for that range finder before, but now I think it’s an awesome piece of equipment,” said Sgt. Andrew Michael of Coral Springs, Fla.

Baghdad was now just 30 miles away.

An Iraqi lieutenant taken prisoner said the Marines had surprised the Al Nida division. His unit had lost radio contact with Baghdad early in the war. Aircraft had pulverized their positions on the highway. The Iraqi lieutenant said he thought the Marines were still far away when they stormed into his ranks along the highway.

Slow start

Friday, April 14, began lazily for the 2nd battalion. There was plenty of time in the morning for a meal. Navy Chaplain Lt. Anthony Bezy persuaded Sgt. Brodie Matherne to give him a haircut in the middle of the highway. Col. North flew in with the crews of a pair of Marine CH-46 helicopters and posed for pictures with many of the Marines.

By day's end, Sgt. Matherne had a bandage around a wound caused when a bullet grazed his head.

Three Marines were dead after an Iraqi ambush at At Tuwayhah, and a fourth was dying.

Cpl. Bernard Gooden, 22, of Mount Vernon, N.Y., died when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded into his tank turret hatch. First Lt. Brian McPhillips, 25, of Pembroke, Mass., died in his first day as commanding officer of the Scout Platoon. He was shot in the back of the head while firing the .50-caliber machine gun in his Humvee.

Sgt. Duane Rios, 35, of Hammond, Ind., was shot in the head while standing through the turret of his infantry amtrack.

First Sgt. Edward Smith, 38, of Chicago, was mortally wounded when the battalion hit the remnants of the Al Nida's headquarters at an intersection near Hatif Haiyawawi.

The battalion was surrounded by smoke and fire, exploding ammunition, smashed Iraqi armor and broken glass. Three rockets blasted craters near the weary Marines as they attempted to sleep.

The infantrymen on watch that night fired on speeding trucks, cars and a bus that seemed intent on crashing into their positions. Nine Iraqi civilians died.

But the road to Baghdad was open. Infantry units coming in behind the tank battalion reported more than 100 dead Arab Muslim volunteers who fought under the banner of Islamic Jihad. Huge ammo dumps were captured. The Al Nida Division of the Republican Guards was deemed "combat ineffective."

An Iraqi major general who was the chief of staff of the Special Republican Guards—the elite among Mr. Hussein's forces—was dead, killed by machine gun fire from one of the battalion's tanks.

"In that engagement, they put a hurtin' on us. But we put a hurtin' back on them," said Staff Sgt. Efrain Torres of Miami, the commander of the battalion's anti-tank missile TOW platoon.

Mr. Estes said the 2nd Battalion's aggressive assault was crucial to bring the Marines to Baghdad and ending the war.

"They did well. No doubt about it," he said. "You got there far too fast for the Iraqis, and you had far too much firepower for them."

"There is no doubt that the Iraqis were unhinged by the rapid movement."





Combat Engineer Battalion in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

by the Staff and Commanders of 1st and 2d Combat Engineer Battalions

Marine Corps Gazette, December 2003.

Tasked organized combat engineer battalions supported combat operations in Iraq.

The events of 11 September 2001 required the United States to reevaluate its own national security strategy and establish a new policy of striking first before being struck. Of major concern was Iraq, labeled by President George W. Bush as one of the axes of evil. Its possible connections to al-Qaeda, weapons of mass destruction, and atrocities committed by the Saddam Hussein regime brought Iraq to the forefront of our concern. 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv), Camp Pendleton also began focusing on Iraq. The division practiced its war plans through tactical exercises without troops and division command post (CP) exercises between Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms over and over again.

The Camp Lejeune Marines from II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) became force providers to the 1st MarDiv and provided 2d Combat Engineer Battalion (2d CEB), 2d Amphibious Assault Battalion, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (2d LAR), 2d Tank Battalion, and two artillery batteries from 10th Marines.

Contingency planning among the Marine Corps' three CEBs—1st CEB of Camp Pendleton, 2d CEB of Camp Lejeune, and 4th CEB of Baltimore, MD—began in the summer of 2002. They held planning sessions among the commanders and staffs to determine how best to fight the CEBs.

There were two primary courses of action (COAs): (1) combine the three battalions into one, or (2) attach each CEB to a regimental combat team (RCT).

Under COA 1, the CEBs would remain in general support of the 1st MarDiv with three engineer support companies (ESCs) while attaching their lettered companies to the RCTs. Under COA 2, each CEB would operate autonomously and be attached to each RCT—1st CEB to RCT-7, 2d CEB to RCT-5, and 4th CEB to RCT-1.

After careful consideration, COA 1 was unanimously chosen. The primary reason was the commanding general's (CG's) requirement for unity of command of the CEBs and wanting one

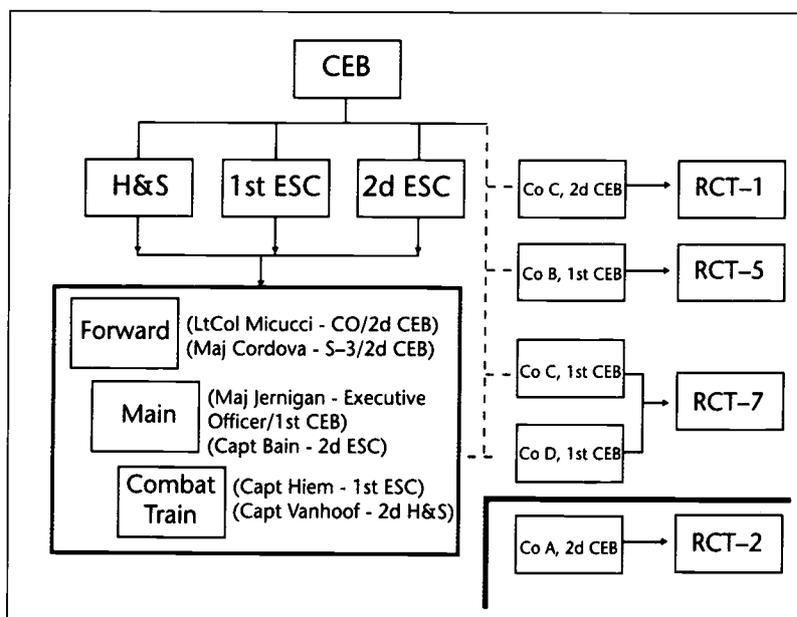


Figure 1.

point of contact for engineers. As a result, the commanding officer (CO) of 1st CEB was chosen to lead a robust G-3 (operations) division engineer section and became the primary adviser to the CG's staff for engineer related matters, while the CO of 2d CEB would lead the combined CEB and carry out the engineer missions.

4th CEB headquarters did not become a part of the combined CEB, and instead became the nucleus of the MEF engineer group. Their lettered companies, although requested to be a part of the combined CEB, were unable to activate due to a cap on Reserve mobilization.

In early January the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the deployment warning order. Both 1st and 2d CEBs readied equipment and personnel for their respective ports of embarkation. When the deployment order was released, 4th CEB was not included, and only 1st and 2d CEBs provided combat engineer support to 1st MarDiv, which was swelling to unprecedented size with its new attachments.

By mid-February, both CEBs were in Kuwait. Their equipment from black bottom shipping and maritime prepositioning ships was following. Most all of it would arrive by early March. The combat engineer lettered companies were attached to the RCTs—Company C, 2d CEB to RCT-1; Company B, 1st CEB to RCT-5; and both Companies C and D, 1st CEB to RCT-7. 2d CEB also attached Company A to RCT-2 as part of Task Force Tarawa. CEB (minus) retained one combined headquarters and service (H&S) company, two separate ESCs, and a security force company. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

The combining of the two battalions doubled the staff traditionally found in a CEB, and as a result, the additional officers and staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) augmented the division engineer section. With a division forward and main CP running 24-hour operations, the normal table of organization of two officers and three SNCOs would not suffice. Instead, the division engineer section included one lieutenant colonel, two majors, three captains, two master sergeants, one staff sergeant, and one corporal.

In early March CEB (minus) divided into a forward command element, main CP, and combat train. The forward and main allowed the battalion to echelon forward and support varied and potentially independent missions while still maintaining command

Unit	Personnel	Purpose
CEB (Forward, Main, Combat Train)	455	CEB Main, Forward, Combat Train
RCT-1 (Co C, 2d CEB)	130	Co C, 2d CEB
RCT-5 (Co B, 1st CEB)	150	Co B, 1st CEB
RCT-7 (Co C, Co D, 1st CEB)	228	Co C and Co D, 1st CEB
2d LAR Bn	11	Engr Reconnaissance
1st Reconnaissance Bn	9	Engr Reconnaissance
Combat Service Support Companies 111, 115, 117	57	Water Detachment
8th ESB	33	Bridge Builders
Kuwait Det	15	Admin and Logistics Support

Figure 2.

and control. Each could reinforce one or more RCTs with additional breaching or mobility capabilities, assist in military operations on urbanized terrain, cut expedient combat roads and trails, or provide survivability or other combat support. The CEB combat train reinforced the forward and main but also took on separate missions of its own.

The reinforced lettered companies attached directly to the RCTs with their platoons attached to the maneuver battalions. They provided an immediate combat engineer capability and facilitated a substantial amount of engineer capability forward. Each RCT also had a robust ESC detachment of six to eight M9 armored combat earthmovers, two or more bulldozers, three or more dump trucks, armored HMMWVs, a maintenance contact vehicle, and the operators and mechanics required to provide ample support. The cell for RCT-7 was led by a major and included a captain as an assistant, a SNCO as an engineer chief, and two radio operators/drivers.

Combat operations kicked off on 19 March, and the combined CEB immediately proved a valuable asset to the 1st MarDiv. The attached combat engineer lettered companies quickly marked the regimental lanes through the breaches from Kuwait into Iraq, supported RCT-7 in their attack on the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Infantry Division at Basrah, and were used as infantry with RCT-1 and RCT-5 in securing the southern gas oil separation plants. Throughout the war the engineers provided mobility to each of the RCTs and the tank battalions, route and engineer reconnaissance to reconnaissance and LAR battalions, and bridge builders for 8th Engineer Support Battalion (8th ESB).

CEB (minus) remained in direct support of the division and, once north of An Nasiriyah, began making improvements along a major logistics route of Highway 1. The mission required a combination of CEB, force service support group, and SeaBee assets. CEB (minus), along with its attachment of ESC, 7th ESB, and four Army D9 armored bulldozers, improved more than 40 kilometers of highway by backfilling/constructing bypass routes for 14 open box culverts that were limiting the division's movement.

By 25 March RCTs-1, -5, and -7 moved well north along Highway 1 with their combat engineers. This was the day of the infamous sandstorm that brought all movement and operations to a grinding halt. In the evening RCT-7 began moving again and the following morning arrived in its position to the southeast of Ad Diwaniyah. The engineers from each battalion were quickly put to work searching for and destroying weapons caches that the Saddam Fedayeen were utilizing to ambush the convoys moving north along the line of communications.

Company C, 2d CEB drove north with RCT-1. The engineer platoons assisted with a deliberate defense in anticipation of a 4- to 6-day pause in operations. They assessed and repaired portions of the Qulat Sikar Airfield, to include repair of a taxiway used to land KC-130s. This engineering effort was accomplished in concert with both Company C, 7th ESB and Marine Wing Support Squadron 272 (MWSS-272).

1st Battalion, 5th Marines (1/5) with 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st CEB attacked to seize Hantush Airfield on 27 March. 2d Platoon was conducting defensive operations with 3/5, as 3d Platoon supported 2/5's feint to the north along Highway 1 in support of the seizure of Hantush. During this period intense fighting took its toll. CEB lost a platoon sergeant from Company B, 1st CEB. It was also about this time that 18 Marines from Company A, 2d CEB, attached to Task Force Tarawa, were injured in combat operations at An Nasiriyah.

By early April units were nearing the Tigris River. The RCTs with their combat engineers destroyed the enemy in the vicinity of An Numaniyah and Al Kut. Combat engineers cleared a minefield on the main supply route entering Al Kut and fought alongside the infantry attacking in zone to seize the bridge crossing sites at the Saddam Canal and the Tigris River. They classified existing bridges to determine load-bearing capability and suitability for heavier vehicles, and also performed engineer reconnaissance to determine the suitability of the river for ribbon bridge operations.

CEB (minus) forward and combat train followed in trace of RCT-7 and assumed control from 1/7 over the An Numaniyah Airfield. They cleared the runway and taxiway of earthen berms and old vehicle hulks left by the Iraqis to deny our use. CEB held the airfield until conducting a relief in place with MWSS-271. CEB (minus) forward and combat train then moved across the Tigris River and north to clear another airfield at Saribaldi. CEB (minus) cleared the airfield of ammunition, earthen berms, debris, antiaircraft artillery pieces,

and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Upon completion of this airfield, CEB forward and combat train moved to Salmon Pak East Airfield, again to clear the runway of earthen berms and debris, and to check for mines and UXO. While at the airfield the commander and key staff met with the local tribal leaders in the immediate area to inform them of upcoming airfield clearing operations.

Meanwhile, CEB (minus) main conducted sensitive site exploitation (SSE) of an ammunition storage facility at Highway 17 and Highway 1 near Ad Diwaniyah. They later moved on to another SSE site, this time north of the Tigris River crossing in the town of Al Aziziyah. Under special orders, their SSE team dug up freshly poured concrete slabs that were suspected of hiding chemical weapons from coalition forces. While maintaining security of the site the SSE team also examined two other sites in the town and investigated an Iraqi general's house. While in Al Aziziyah residents pointed out multiple weapons caches throughout the town. The SSE team also found several caches independently. The SSE team collected countless ammunition and weapons stores and destroyed everything that could be used immediately against coalition forces, including a T-55 tank.

As forces moved closer to Baghdad, Company C, 1st CEB used demolitions to destroy part of the span of the bridge allowing construction of the medium girder bridge. 1st Tank Battalion crossed the river approximately 15 kilometers to the north utilizing an armored vehicle-launched bridge (AVLB) to span the destroyed section of their bridge. Company C, 2d CEB assisted 8th ESB and the Army's 65th Engineers in a river crossing operation on a canal on the east side of Baghdad.

They also helped construct a ribbon bridge across the canal and set up an AVLB span over a partially destroyed civilian bridge.

Further to the north, the Platoon Commander, 4th Platoon, Company C, 2d CEB and one of his squad leaders swam across the canal and performed a ford site reconnaissance to determine the suitability for amphibious assault vehicles to cross. After crossing the Diyala River, RCT-7 continued their push into Baghdad, dividing the area of responsibility into sectors for each battalion. The units located and either destroyed or removed hundreds of weapons, equipment, and ammunition caches.

On 8 April the CEB (minus) forward sent an SSE team to the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission facility—also known as the Tuwaitha Atomic Energy Facility. This impressive facility, comprising 94 buildings ranging from libraries to laboratories and over 16 square kilometers of grounds, was critical to determining the status of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction research program. The SSE team of more than 90 Marines and sailors secured the facility from looters and preserved valuable evidence of interest to the U.S. Government and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Looters continually jumped the fence and crossed earthen berms but were repelled with appropriate force.

As Company B entered Baghdad they assisted in securing an urban area northeast of Saddam City and conducted countermobility operations along Route 5 in Baghdad with revetments and survivability positions, as well as manned foot-mobile and vehicle checkpoints.

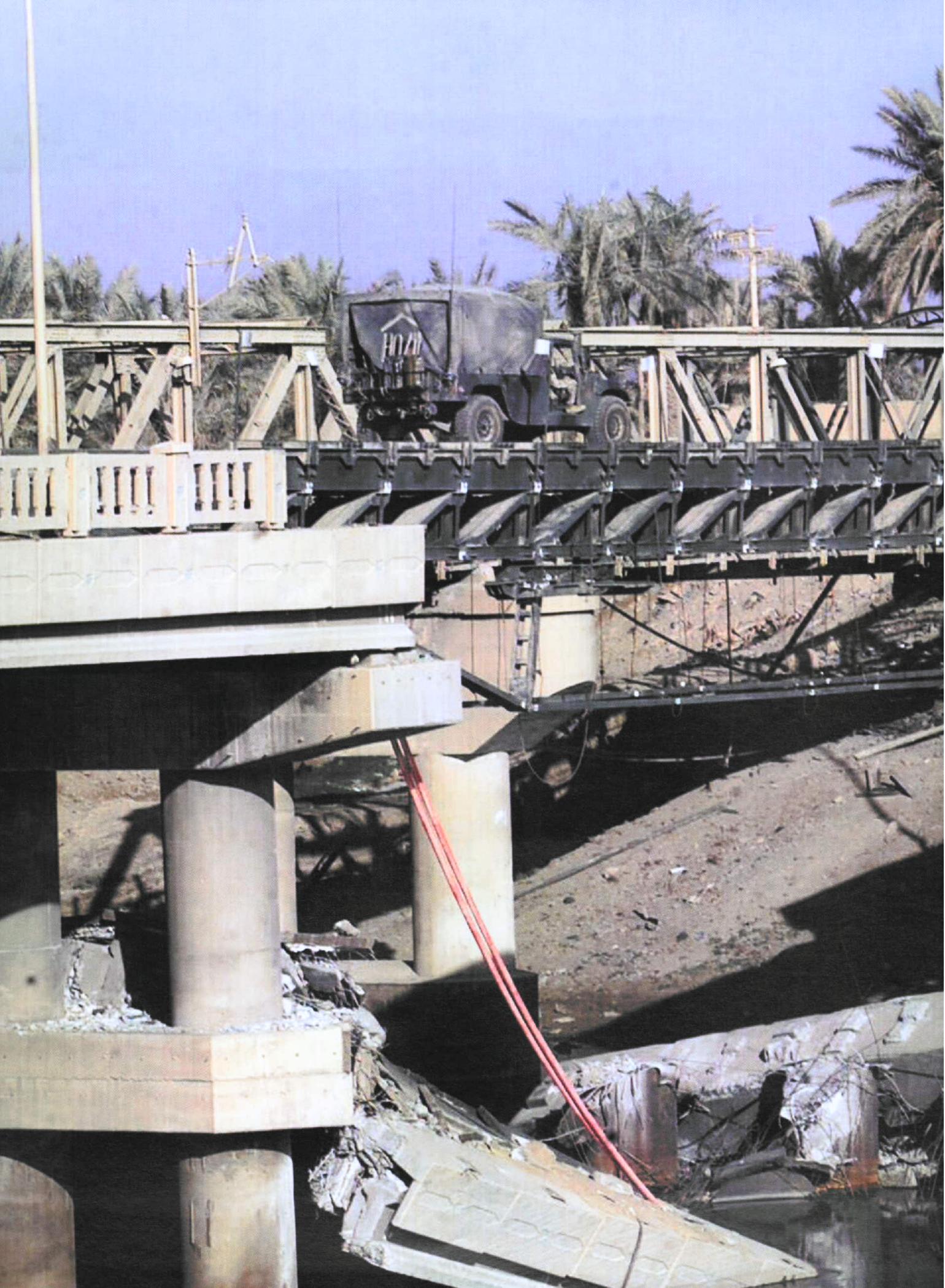
On 11 April, conducting its final push into Baghdad, CEB (minus) relocated near the Rasheed Airfield. They were tasked with consolidating all arms and ammunition caches in the eastern half of Baghdad while at the same time conducting SSE at the Iraqi atomic agency. Augmented by companies from 7th and 8th ESBs, they seized and destroyed large ammunition caches, created mobile teams to examine ordnance, searched for boobytraps, and determined if the ordnance could be safely transported to the ammunition holding site. All of the combat engineers with the RCTs conducted similar missions.

During mid-April, Task Force Tripoli stood up and conducted offensive combat operations at Iraq's last stronghold—the town of Tikrit. Company D, 1st CEB augmented the task force and established a blocking obstacle south of the city. They also provided heavy equipment support to 2d LAR for blocking operations, assisted in rapid runway repair with MWSS-372, and disposed of large weapons caches.

On 20 April CEB (minus) moved south to an Iraqi military facility in Ad Diwaniyah after conducting a relief in place with units from the 3d Infantry Division. It was during this time that the combined CEB transformed back to two separate battalions, 1st and 2d CEBs. Each began to focus on their redeployment to the United States.

Conclusion

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM proved once more that there are never enough combat engineers on the battlefield and why both 1st and 2d CEBs were required. The combining of two CEBs was the first of its kind. They were spread throughout the division and attached to more than 12 different battalions. This robust and highly capable organization of more than 1,100 Marines and sailors, whether conducting bridge or route reconnaissance, clearing mines or airfields, guarding sensitive sites, or fighting as infantry, accomplished every mission assigned to them and provided the 1st MarDiv with a combat engineer capability unseen in any previous war.





Combining 1st and 2d Combat Engineer Battalions: Should We Do It Again?

by Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Micucci

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While combining CEBs during OIF provided a capable combat engineer resource, questions remain concerning the best way to employ combat engineers in the future.

Operation IRAQ FREEDOM (OIF) presented many challenges that gave rise to new opportunities for the Marines Corps. Among these was the forming of a combined combat engineer battalion (CEB) from the resources of the two active duty CEBs—1st CEB from Camp Pendleton and 2d CEB from Camp Lejeune. The combined CEB proved successful during OIF, effectively accomplishing all assigned missions while providing the 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv) with a robust, highly capable combat engineer resource. While overall success was enjoyed by the battalion, it is worth examining several issues encountered during this experience in order to ascertain if this was, in fact, the best way to employ the combat engineers. This article will provide such an examination and will offer some lessons learned for consideration if such combination is to be planned for in the future.

Other battalions combined for OIF, such as the amphibious assault battalions, but none combined and integrated to the extent as the CEBs that merged two staffs so that there was only one commanding officer (CO), executive officer, S-1 (personnel), and so forth. Even our name changed to “Combat Engineer Battalion” with no number designator of 1st or 2d CEB.

The combined CEB was distributed in support of more than 12 separate battalions. It was comprised of more than 1,100 Marines and sailors completing missions ranging from bridge and route reconnaissance, improving the mobility along Highway 1, breaching and clearing mines, sensitive site security, clearing airfields, fighting as infantry, building bridges, collecting and destroying weapons caches, and conducting civil-military operations and humanitarian assistance.

1st, 2d, and 4th CEBs met in December 2002 to finalize how the battalions would organize for combat. The 1st MarDiv commanding general’s sole mandate was that he wanted one point of contact for the engineers; specifically, the CO, 1st CEB would assume the role as the division engineer officer. This requirement essentially allowed the CEBs two courses of action

(COAs). First, attach each CEB to a regimental combat team (RCT), or secondly, combine the battalions under the CO, 2d CEB, and attach the letter companies to the RCTs. Collectively, we selected the second COA. Under this arrangement the letter companies were augmented with a robust heavy equipment/motor transport detachment, and the CEB personnel remaining—consisting of two headquarters and service (H&S) companies, two engineer support companies, and a combat engineer platoon—were consolidated and placed in general support of the 1st MarDiv. This slice of combat engineers would carry out separate missions, but more importantly, was available to reinforce the RCTs as required.

For each RCT we also decided to establish a regimental engineer cell led by a major who would coordinate the efforts of the combat engineer companies (two to three per regiment) and the support detachment. He would also become the primary advisor to the regimental commander for all engineer matters.

All CEB commanders agreed this was a solid plan, and everything was on track until January when the Marine Corps was unable to activate 4th CEB. This situation reduced the number of combat engineer companies by 50 percent. Fortunately, ground operations succeeded and occurred at the speed required by the force commander, but the engineers were definitely undermanned from the start. Without 4th CEB's combat engineer companies we were only able to field four companies for the 1st MarDiv. (Company C, 2d CEB, supported RCT-1; Company B, 1st CEB, supported RCT-5; and both Companies C and D, 1st CEB, supported RCT-7. 2d CEB also attached Company A to RCT-2 as part of Task Force Tarawa.) We also decided to scratch the regimental engineer cell except for RCT-7, who was designated as the division's initial main effort.

Combining two battalions provided a substantial combat engineer capability, but it also created some unforeseen consequences that should be addressed in the future before a decision is made to combine battalions. Specifically, there are four major issues: time, leadership, increased size of the H&S company, and the engineer capability with the RCTs. I will describe how the combined CEB dealt with each of these along with how we attempted to alleviate some of the challenges we had to face.

Time and the Impact of Unit Cohesion

We had 5 weeks until we crossed the line of departure. This was not a significant amount of time considering the majority of our effort was spent receiving equipment from strategic shipping and trying to integrate the new group into a cohesive unit. This effort occurs in every major deployment but not to the degree experienced by battalions deploying from opposite coasts. The inevitable consequence was reduced time available for the necessary detailed planning, immediate actions refinement, and conducting "what if" drills. Although we did accomplish these things within the 5 weeks prior to combat operations, our ability to do it to the depth desired was severely restricted because we also experienced significant growing pains trying to determine who we were as a combined unit and who was the best qualified for particular requirements.

OIF was a I Marine Expeditionary Force fight with 2d MarDiv serving as a force provider (with the exception of 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade and Task Force Tarawa). Although 2d CEB had been involved in most of the planning and coordinated with 1st CEB in deciding how to outfit the combined battalion with personnel and equipment, we continued to work off of the 2d MarDiv training schedule until December 2002. Our focus did not totally shift to OIF until Combined Arms Exercise 3/4 was canceled, and we knew with some degree of certainty that we were deploying to Southwest Asia.

Clearly, in the future, sufficient time must be allotted for the merged battalions to become a cohesive unit. If there is not enough time, then don't combine the battalions. Ultimately, we made the combination work and did so with success. However, I believe there were other battalions, who had trained together for the past year, that were better synchronized.

There Will Be Leadership Changes and Challenges

When merging battalions it seems reasonable to assume that the combination of leadership will be a 50/50 split, but this was not the case for CEB. 2d CEB came in with some very senior staff. For example, we had three master sergeants, senior first lieutenants in most sections, and four major selectees. As a result 2d CEB took many of the senior billets within the combined battalion. Assigned as the commander I felt

very comfortable with this outcome. After all, I had trained and deployed with my Marines for the past year during battalion-and division-level exercises at Fort AP Hill, VA and Camp Lejune, and I knew their capabilities. More importantly, I knew how they would react under stress and in the absence of orders. I could not say the same about my sister battalion, since I knew few of their officers or staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) before meeting them either a few months prior or while in theater.

Merging of sections, such as the communications platoon, proved very challenging. Senior Marines were placed in senior billets and junior Marines who had done much of the planning became assistants. This became very frustrating and upsetting for some of them. Merging battalions will create a new command, and the mixture of the staff will never seem fair to all. Additionally, some junior leaders found difficulty in relinquishing their loyalties to their former superiors knowing that when the war was over they would serve for them again. Although most were professional and accepted the combined arrangement, there were some who eagerly sought out their previous bosses when the outcome of decisions was not to their liking. This was frustrating and had unsatisfactory impacts to say the least.

Both commanders of 1st and 2d CEBs were selected by a board to command their battalions and lead Marines. All of a sudden when it comes time to deploy, one is relegated to being a staff officer as the division engineer while the other is going to lead both battalions. If not for the division engineer cell, one commander may have been forced to work for the other. Only a very gracious and unselfish commander will relinquish his command to someone else, especially during time of war. Even so, the arrangement is bound to produce friction at some level.

Also very unique, the merging of the battalions accounted for two sergeants major. My hat goes off to both of them because they made the arrangement work. I do not know many sergeants major who are willing to share command, but these two gentlemen did so professionally and selflessly. The battalion was better served with both of them because we had two sets of eyes from the senior enlisted leadership. This arrangement was successful but could have been a catastrophe. During ground offensive operations my sergeant major went with me in the CEB forward, and 1st CEB's sergeant major went with the battalion XO in the CEB main.

Have a Plan for a Headquarters That Is Double the Normal Size

Although combining two CEBs established unity of command, we did not realize the impact of doubling the H&S company. The unintended consequence was too many chiefs—too many leaders who were underutilized. As the two battalions merged, only one person could be in charge of each of the many sections within the H&S company. We had three supply lieutenants, but only one would be in charge. We had three communications officers, but only one would be the battalion communications officer. The others became “Alphas” or “Zulus” or convoy serial commanders. During time of war Marines will do whatever is asked of them, but each wants to contribute to the success of the organization. With so many extra SNCOs and officers this was not always possible, at least not in the manner expected. It requires a great deal of maturity to deal with change on this level and to remain focused on “mission first.”

To partially alleviate the problem we established a security company led by one of the H&S company commanders. The company's primary mission was to provide security for the CEB. This worked well. This company also had an additional combat engineer platoon to reinforce the RCTs if required and to hold sensitive sites—that became a primary CEB mission. We also split the battalion into a forward, main, and combat train ensuring capable leadership within each element and reducing our maneuver footprint vice moving all elements together.

CEB's two engineer support companies, who had their own staffs and distinct styles, were more than capable of carrying out assigned missions. They did so but were often accompanied with additional oversight from an enlarged H&S company.

The additional staff officers allowed us to increase the size of the division engineer cell. This was a positive development because the traditional division engineer cell consists of two officers and three SNCOs, which may not be sufficient for completing all of the required tasks during combat operations. Combining the battalions permitted four additional officers to work in the division engineer cell, which

accommodated 24-hour operations for both the division engineer forward and main.

Ensure Combat Engineer Capability at the RCTs Is Sufficient

Of all of the issues, the most important is providing sufficient combat engineer capability to the RCTs. Placing engineer assets where they can best influence the battle, exploit the main effort, and provide the required mobility, countermobility, and survivability to the ground combat forces will facilitate success.

For OIF we placed 75 percent of our capability forward with the RCTs and equipped them with additional heavy equipment and motor transport assets. CEB's combined H&S company, two engineer support companies, and one combat engineer platoon were held in general support of the division and conducted independent missions throughout the division's zone. Having this capability prevented the division from pulling engineer assets from the RCTs. One of the most critical missions CEB performed while in this role was the clearance of three airfields at An Numaniyah, Saribaldi, and Salman Pak East. Intelligence showed obstacles and possible mines on each. CEB had the equipment, manpower, and know-how to clear the airfields. We also held four sensitive sights consisting of possible weapons of mass destruction and large weapons caches, improved 40 kilometers of Highway 1, and conducted civil-military operations and humanitarian assistance.

The Iraqi terrain made cross-country movement impossible, and all units were fixed to the roads where massive traffic jams occurred. CEB was often bogged down within these. Forcing our way forward into the RCT zones proved difficult because the RCTs did not want additional forces in their zones. They were concerned about safety and fratricide. Their arguments were valid, but CEB was a division element and a tremendous capability. Our primary mission was to reinforce the RCTs with additional engineer personnel and assets, and this could not occur if we didn't move forward. Because of the Iraqi terrain and highway congestion, reinforcements were slow to effect, and moving additional equipment forward often took days. Retrieving the equipment was just as difficult. This is why we attached more than three-quarters of our assets to the RCTs. The other alternative, attaching a CEB to each RCT, would have only added about 10 percent additional combat engineer capability to each. There would have been no problem getting into their zones, but there also would have been no general engineer support capability to carry out separate missions or reinforce a particular RCT if required.

Conclusion

Was combining the CEBs the best thing? For OIF it was, considering our desire to have a combat engineer capability in general support of the division and at the same time sufficiently outfitting the RCTs with combat engineers. The general support force proved valuable on numerous occasions either reinforcing the RCTs or carrying out independent missions.

But combining battalions was not trouble-free, and the success of the merger lies with the Marines and sailors of both 1st and 2d CEBs who, as expected, overcame all adversities and adapted to the combined battalion arrangement despite some of the unforeseen challenges. Even though all missions were successfully accomplished, I would be cautious in thinking that the merging of battalions should be the norm.

There are some major issues to address as far ahead of time as possible. First, before combining battalions ensure there is enough time to create a team that will operate and fight as a cohesive unit. If not, then don't combine the battalions. Also, understand there will be leadership changes and challenges. Some can be worked out ahead of time, but many will have to be taken care of in theater. Be ready to face them, and have a plan to employ an H&S company double the normal size. This is something we should have looked at more closely during our planning. I would recommend writing out the table of organization down to the last Marine before deploying so that everyone knows their roles. We partially did this but not to the detail required. Last, and most importantly, ensure that the RCTs are properly outfitted with sufficient combat engineer capability to win. We did this by attaching more than 75 percent of our overall combat engineer resources to them. I feel this engineer force facilitated success, although the addition of 4th CEB would have been a definite asset.

OIF presented an opportunity unseen before in the Marine Corps and that was the combining of the combat engineers. It is important we take the lessons learned to make decisions about how we will fight in

the future. Carefully addressing the issues of time, leadership, an oversized H&S company, and the resources available to the RCTs during the planning stages, or at least being prepared to address them in theater, will assist in determining if combining battalions is the best course of action.